SHORT STORIES

EDITED BY C. ARTHUR PEARSON (OF PEARSON'S WEEKLY)

No. 510. FOR WEEK ENDING OCTOBER 8TH, 1898. [ONE PENNY.

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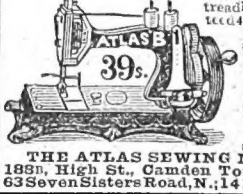

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SHORT STORIES

THOSE WHO FOUGHT AT OMDURMAN.

No. 2.—The Seaforth Highlanders.

No. 510.

ONE PENNY.

For the Week Ending October 8th, 1898.

How He Missed His Chance.

"You are working too hard, old man," said Jack Bingham's friends, one after another, as they saw his ruddy cheeks turn pale, his springy, elastic tread become dull and dragging, and heard less and less often his cheery if not exactly tuneful whistle.

But to all their good advice and earnest protests Jack turned a deaf ear, and kept steadily at work.

None of his friends properly appreciated Jack's unusual devotion to work, for none of them knew its incentive—that he was in love.

She was a dainty little thing, always admired by men, and rather looked down upon and at the same time envied by her own sex, at home the pet of her parents, and in society an imperious and exacting young belle.

Jack worked early and late, steadily and hopefully, to secure that competence which he knew would be necessary to support her in the comfort to which she was accustomed. The copy he turned out was good in spite of its volume; his regular salary from his paper was increased, together with his duties; and his income from outside work reached a respectable figure.

Still, the money did not come fast enough to suit the impatient lover, who thereupon began to worry and fret. Now the man who works with his brain sixteen hours a day, and worries and frets in addition, has not a long career of usefulness before him, be his motives what they may.

Jack's eyes gave way first. Specks and blurs floated in them, and through them jumped pains that drew his head down on his folded arms in spite of himself. His feet and hands grew heavy, as if his blood had turned to lead. Presently the pain that gnawed at the back of his eyeballs refused to yield even to sleep. Then Jack grew afraid, but did not let his fear keep him from his work.

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He was not sure of himself in those days, and adopted the precaution of reading over aloud whatever of importance he had written. One day it came about that as he read his tongue seemed suddenly swollen and useless, and he could not utter the words his mind framed. He turned to his typewriter and placed, as he thought, the heading he desired on the article he had written but could not read.

When the foreman in the composing room saw "The Love of Ethel" introducing a column on the Far East, he laughed at first, and then, remembering Jack's looks of late, grew grave.

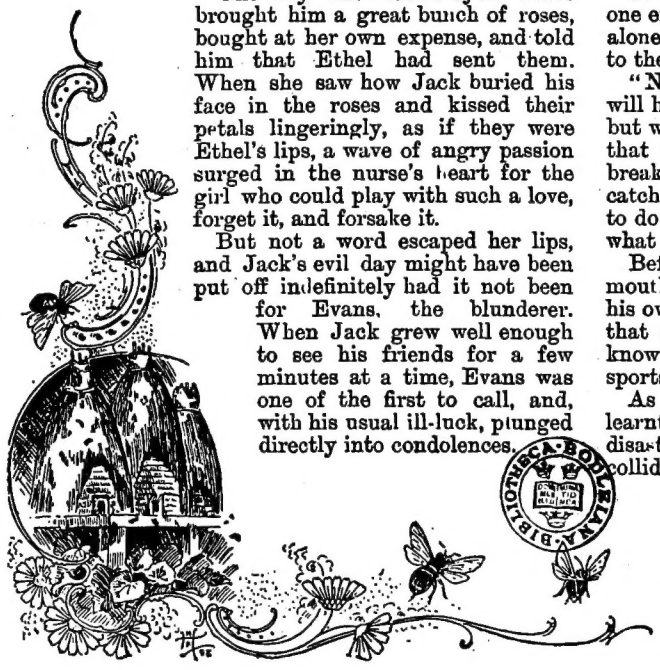
Soon the managing editor came, and Jack was led away to a cab, babbling thickly about Ethel, his work and the money he had saved—money that proved of great value in the long months that followed. For Jack was an orphan, his friends were careless, happy-go-lucky Bohemians, and brain fever is an illness that demands the most skilful of physicians and the most careful of nurses.

So when Jack came to himself again, very pale and thin and quiet, he knew that his precious store must be drained low.

That troubled him little, however, compared with his torturing doubt of Ethel. Why did he not hear from her? Why did not she come to him now that he was so much better? The kindly doctor had noticed Jack's trouble; by a quiet inquiry had discovered what probably lay at the bottom of it, and so had an answer ready for Jack when the latter screwed up his courage to ask for Ethel.

She had been as ill as he, they told him, and like him was now slowly but surely recovering. And Jack must not worry about her in the least, for the doctor would bring him news from her every day.

So Jack kept obediently quiet among his pillows, listening intently for the doctor's footsteps, and flushing like a girl when the news was good, as, somehow, it always was.



One day the brown-eyed nurse brought him a great bunch of roses, bought at her own expense, and told him that Ethel had sent them. When she saw how Jack buried his face in the roses and kissed their petals lingeringly, as if they were Ethel's lips, a wave of angry passion surged in the nurse's heart for the girl who could play with such a love, forget it, and forsake it.

But not a word escaped her lips, and Jack's evil day might have been put off indefinitely had it not been for Evans, the blunderer. When Jack grew well enough to see his friends for a few minutes at a time, Evans was one of the first to call, and, with his usual ill-luck, plunged directly into condolences.

Jack did not quite understand at first, but Evans, floundering ahead, soon made it clear to the invalid that Ethel had not been ill; but that, on the contrary, while the issue of his illness had been still doubtful, she had thrown him over and had announced her engagement to another.

After that Jack went back into the valley of the shadow and knocked at the very gates of death. But the doctor and the nurse, working desperately together, pulled him away and led him back to life. Whereat he was not so grateful as he ought to have been.

And when he found he must get well, whether he would or no, he announced that he was going back to work at once. The doctor remonstrated, commanded, begged, in vain, and the pleadings of the nurse had no effect.

Back he crept to his old haunts, a thin, pale ghost of his former self. The young fellows who were doing his work looked at him with pity.

His old desk had long since been in the possession of another, but the proprietor, when Jack asked for a place, gave orders at once that he should be employed at whatever he was able to do.

But banquets and balls, receptions and races, lectures, sermons and interviews, quickly cloyed the appetite of the newspaper man who had been used to the strong meat of journalism for his daily diet.

"Give me something with blood in it," Jack said to the chief one day. "I'm tired of this woman's work. When I was on earth before they were not afraid to send me out after big stories once in a while."

"It's for you we're afraid and not for the story, Jack, and you know it," expostulated the chief. "Everyone believes that no man on the paper can work up a sensation with you. But you are not strong yet for a rough job, Jack. Look in the glass and see for yourself. Just take it easy for a while longer, old man, and trust us to work you hard enough by-and-by to make up."

The "story with blood in it" came sooner than anyone expected. The very next day Jack chanced to be alone in the reporters' room when the sub-editor came to the door and cast a worried glance round.

"No one else here, Jack?" he asked. "Then you will have to go. I hate to send you, for it's a hard trip, but we'll help you all we can. They have just wired that there's a big smash at Ketterton Junction. A breakdown train will go out in ten minutes. You must catch it, wire in a first story for an extra, and then plan to do the introduction for the later editions. You know what to do better than I can tell you."

Before the last words were out of the sub-editor's mouth Jack was half way down the stairs, pulling on his overcoat as he went. His nerves were tingling with that subtle elation of conflict which newspaper men know as well as do soldiers on the verge of battle and sportsmen in sight of big game.

As the train rushed along through the night Jack learnt all that the railway men could tell him of the disaster. An extra goods and a through express had collided on a curved embankment which skirted the banks of a river.

The scene Jack looked upon that winter's night was as fascinating in its weird horror as was that of summer in its vivid colouring. Out of a clouded sky the moon struggled in vain to pierce the heavy, snow-laden darkness.

Upon the line, and tumbled on either side, engines and cars were piled in huge, formless

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heaps. Stifled shrieks and screams sounded from the depths of the black masses. Here and there the gleaming lanterns darted like will-o'-the-wisps, frequently converging upon one point, where lay a torch-guarded row of the dead.

Suddenly, while Jack strained his eyes to pierce the gloom, a little tongue of flame leapt into the darkness.

"The wreckage is on fire!" cried the railway man at his side, and there came as if in answer from the chaos a shrill cry of torture.

The fire, leaping from point to point, licked greedily at the dry wood of the splintered coaches, and again the piercing shriek made Jack shiver in spite of himself.

Clambering over the *débris* in the direction from which the screams seemed to come, he found, almost at the bottom of the great pile, a woman, saved from instant death by a freak of fate, but pinned down and cramped until movement was impossible. She had swooned at the crash of the collision, apparently, and had been brought back to consciousness by the heat of the advancing flames.

One glance and Jack knew the face.

"Ethel!"

He started as he uttered the name, and the woman shrank back even towards death at the sound of his voice. In a moment the weakness passed, and he attacked the imprisoning pile. Help came from all directions, and slowly a way of escape was opened.

But the flames swept swiftly on, scorching the girl's delicate flesh, charring her golden hair, and dragging from her shrieks of pain that tore the hearts of those who heard them. Jack's feverish strength increased with each recurring cry, and he pulled and lifted with a power that amazed his helpers and himself.

At last he reached her, held her in his arms for a single moment, then passed her back to willing hands. On the instant a piece of iron, its supports burnt away, dropped from the over-hanging pile and struck him on the shoulder.

They thought he was dead when, senseless, he was rescued. But presently, in an improvised farmhouse hospital, he came back to consciousness to find a flood of pale gold hair covering his face, to feel the warm kisses of full lips on his bloodless ones, and to hear a sweet voice says:

"Jack! My Jack! It is Ethel. Don't you know me?"

If Jack had been physically stronger, perhaps, the barriers, which long months of bitter contempt had raised, would not have been so easily swept away. But as it was he whispered: "My darling," and raised one arm weakly to fold about her neck.

Afterwards he was very glad that he did, for the truth came out little by little; he learnt that the fault was not Ethel's but her matchmaking mamma's, and that in the girl's own heart he had never been supplanted.

It was some months later when Jack returned, hale and hearty, with new hope in his soul, to his work, that the sub-editor said:

"Too bad you had to miss your chance at the Ketterton accident, old man."

"Chance? What chance?" asked Jack, bewildered.

"Why, don't you remember that you were the only newspaper man on the spot? If you hadn't got knocked out we should have had the scoop of the year."

"By Jove! That's so," said Jack regretfully. "And I had quite forgotten it."

H. T. P.

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NOTE.—A similar competition in which 50 sovereigns are given away is appearing weekly in HOME NOTES.

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A Perfect Revelation.

Out of Pessimism, by Rejection; that was the moral pedigree of Mr. Magdalen, cynic.

The pessimism began in his stomach, and ended by settling in his mind; a one-time badly digested dinner eventually turned the channel of his thoughts into a misanthropic course.

As for the rejection, that was of the kind that consists of a pretty girl carefully leading a man into a trap, and then just as carefully turning her back upon him.

It is only fair, in the case of Mr. Magdalen, to mention that the number of his rejections had been quite formidable—due, most probably, to the film that his vanity was for ever drawing over his clearer judgment. A wounded vanity is not infrequently the beginning of cynicism.

But however all that may be, the fact remained that Mr. Magdalen, at the time that concerns this narrative, was very much at variance with the world, and tired of all that therein was.

Perhaps his dinner had again done him the impoliteness to disagree with him; perhaps another pretty girl had just opened her eyes in delightfully feigned astonishment, murmured:

"Oh, Mr. Magdalen, I am so sorry!" and left him once more disconsolate; certain it is that he went to his rooms, on this particular evening, and, confidently addressing the pictures on the walls, spoke aloud concerning many things that oppressed him.

"Bah! I'm sick of it all. Oh, the hideous hollowness of the whole fabric of civilisation! Lies, sham, and hypocrisy everywhere; everyone must be believed a scoundrel until the opposite is proved; circle lies within circle of conventions, of rules and regulations, making a man a mere machine. This is not living; there is no freedom of action in all this. At every opening one is hampered; social usage, good form and fetishes of that sort are guarding every portal that leads to free will and naturalness. And what good does it all do? H'm! it's done me a sweet lot of good, I must say! No, the thing for me to do is to cut the whole shooting-match, to pull up sticks and depart for wilds—somewhere out of the world."

Mr. Magdalen was really very much in earnest. The very next morning he walked to the house of his friend, Major Fewsleer, and said to that gentleman:

"Old man, do me a favour. I'm heartily sick of this part of the world and I want air. You've got lots of it out on the Texas prairies. I want some of it. In other words, give me a letter to your foreman on the T-Square ranch, telling him I'm coming down for my health, or any other stuff like that you can think of. As a matter of fact, I'm going because I'm sick of this. What do you think?"

"I think," said the Major sententiously, "that you're more kinds of an italicised fool than there are in the dictionary. What the Tom, Dick, and Harry do you want to go and frizzle in that beastly sun for, with no one to speak to but cowboys whose talk is all cattle?"

"Major," said Mr. Magdalen a trifle wearily, "you mean well, I know; but everything you say only makes me long to get down there. Why, man, nobody to speak to is just what I'm yearning for, and nothing to look at will make eyes as good as new again. Come now, will you do me this favour, or won't you? Because——"

"Oh, well, if you put it that way," said the Major deprecatingly, and promptly sat down and wrote the letter needed.

Thus it came about that in due course of time, there appeared at the T-Square ranch a young man with a tired expression on his face and a letter in his hand. Presently he was rid of both, and was a cowboy like the rest. The freedom that the prairies seemed to promise filled him with a buoyancy of spirit that he had not known for many a long day, and the absence of all that had been galling him in the world he had left was also soothing to his soul.

Among the other cowboys he was accounted, when that happened at all, as a somewhat morose character, which opinion was due to the caustic remarks he occasionally let fall concerning the world of manners and customs. Whenever he spoke of Texas, it was with unbounded enthusiasm.

The one thing that somewhat annoyed him about the T-Square was the presence of the foreman's daughter. He had come down here especially to get away from all that sort of thing; and now one of the first things that he found was a gipsy-like little beauty who spoke Spanish and English in charming alternation, and rode like an Amazon.

However, she was practically a savage, he thought to himself in consolation, and didn't really count. Her father, Mr. Eslington, had grown old on the T-Square; he had married, so Magdalen seemed to have heard, a Mexican or Spaniard, and Miss Mamie had presumably never seen anything but the prairies, and was just about as wild as the cactus growing thereabouts. On consideration of which, Mr. Magdalen smoothed away his first displeasure by the assurance that she didn't count at all.

He rarely saw the girl; and when he did, she was galloping along with her hair streaming out behind her like some wild thing, or else was humming some

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Mexican song or other that he didn't understand and didn't want to.

Magdalen had contracted the habit, after work, of taking solitary rides; it was in the course of one of these that a curious thing happened to him.

He was galloping at full speed across the open prairie, his hat far back on his head, and his eyes fixed on the horizon.

That was what brought him to grief—that gazing out into the wide world, and riding meanwhile into a prairie-dog's dug-out. The pony stumbled, fell on his knees, and Mr. Magdalen went whirling off over the animal's ears.

When he tried to move, he found there was something the matter with his ankle. The pony had got up again, and was standing still, grazing; but Mr. Magdalen was lying on the ground groaning and muttering unpleasant things.

As the moments went by, it became more and more evident to him that he certainly was in a fix. He couldn't move without hideous pain, and the boys of the ranch wouldn't miss him for hours to come. He wondered what had happened.

And while he was yet wondering, his pony pricked up its ears, whinnied, and turned to greet Miss Mamie's pony, which just then galloped up, its fair rider in the saddle. In an instant she had dismounted and was by Magdalen's side.

"My ankle's twisted, I believe," he said apologetically. He was glad someone had come, but he would have preferred anyone else.

"Yes," said Miss Mamie, after a hasty examination, ', and it's a tollably bad twist too. Yo' cain't walk at all, what? I'll have to——"

Then, before he could even have time for astonishment, Magdalen found himself being carried in this girl's arms, and presently being placed in his saddle. "And now," said Miss Mamie, breathing a trifle hard, "if we rides home moderate, 'spect you can stand it till we get to th' house."

"How shall I ever thank you?" began Magdalen; but she interrupted him with a "Don't!" And he could do nothing but continue to wonder and to gaze furtively at this magnificent young creature riding by his side.

It seemed to him now that he had hitherto been curiously blind in the matter of this girl's evident beauty; and it occurred to him, in a swift flash, that here was a girl so different from those away in England, so untrammelled and free, so unsullied by the knowledge of conventions, as to be a perfect revelation, an unsuspected delight.

In the days after his accident, when he lay on a couch in the ranch-house, he turned this new idea over and over in his mind, fed it with frequent glimpses of Miss Mamie, as she flitted to and fro through the house, and finally came to the conclusion that it was a pretty good idea.

Miss Mamie's eyes as he looked at them when she brought him some of those mysterious compounds especially intended for convalescents, seemed to him to become daily more fair, and daily he increased in wonderment at his former blindness. Why, she was a very prairie-flower, a rara avis, an unspoiled child of nature, a beauty blushing unseen in the desert. Why should she not be the one in all the world to prove the oruth of his firm belief, that good was to be found only tutside civilisation?

And so it came about that Mr. Magdalen, cynic, fell in love with Miss Mamie Eslington completely, unreservedly. Everything about her was a delight to him, from her hair, free to the breezes, to her queer Western speech.

As for her, she allowed him to make love to her without doing much herself beyond appearing to like it. There was a mysterious twinkle in her eyes all the while, that to the disinterested observer would have been named humour, though to Magdalen it was love-light.

Mr. Magdalen at length came to the conclusion that he wanted Mamie to be his wife. The many rides they had taken together, the long talks they had had, consisting chiefly of language on the part of Magdalen, and smiling silence on Mamie's side, had made him more and more aware of the many beauties of her nature. Occasionally he had been startled by sudden lapses from her prairie dialect into perfectly pure English; but she had always reverted just as suddenly, and he had forgotten the thing.

So it happened that, as they rode together one beautiful salmon-tinted even, Magdalen leant over and said swiftly, passionately, to the girl beside him:

"Miss Mamie, I can't keep on seeing you this way, day after day, without telling you—telling you that I—I love you. Perhaps you've seen it; girls usually do, I believe. But I must tell you. And I want you to be my wife, Mamie. Won't you?"

"Well!" said Mamie, "but I'm—I'm skeered! I 'spose I'd better ask—" Then she broke into a musical burst of merriment. "There," she said, relapsing suddenly into wonderfully pure English and holding out her pretty hand to Magdalen, "take it, you silly boy. Yes, of course I've known it all along, and I'll confess I tried to trap you; only," and she hung her head and blushed so prettily that Magdalen, through all his astonishment, wanted to kiss her, "only—I got caught myself. You see, papa got a private letter from Major Fewsleer, advising him of your real reason for coming out here, and of course papa couldn't keep it from me. And so I——"

Magdalen was kissing her hand rapturously. Then he caught his breath sharply and gasped: "But you—you talk so—so differently!"

"Yes, you blind cynic; of course I do. What do you suppose I was educated and lived in England for, if I can't speak English?"

"Oh!" gasped Magdalen, "and I thought——"

"Yes; pity, isn't it? But you've no chance to escape now. You thought you were finding a flower untouched by the contamination of civilisation, and now you see you weren't, you dear boy. Isn't civilisation a little good, after all?"

She was leaning towards him; the enchantment of her voice and her eyes came to him like a flood; her beautiful hair was lifted by a passing zephyr until it curled before him like a promise of Heaven; and then, as he pressed his lips upon hers, he murmured:

"Civilisation is beautiful—if you say so, you little witch!"

Before they reached the ranch again, many more things had occurred which proved that a woman's little finger can twist resolutions that have been years in building. Magdalen had agreed to take her back to civilisation and become once more a sociable animal. Finally, the little witch said very roguishly:

"And as I am to take your heart back to civilisation, don't you think you had better leave your cynicism out here on the prairies?"

And from the fervour of his assent it is reasonable to believe that he did. WALTER WALTERS.

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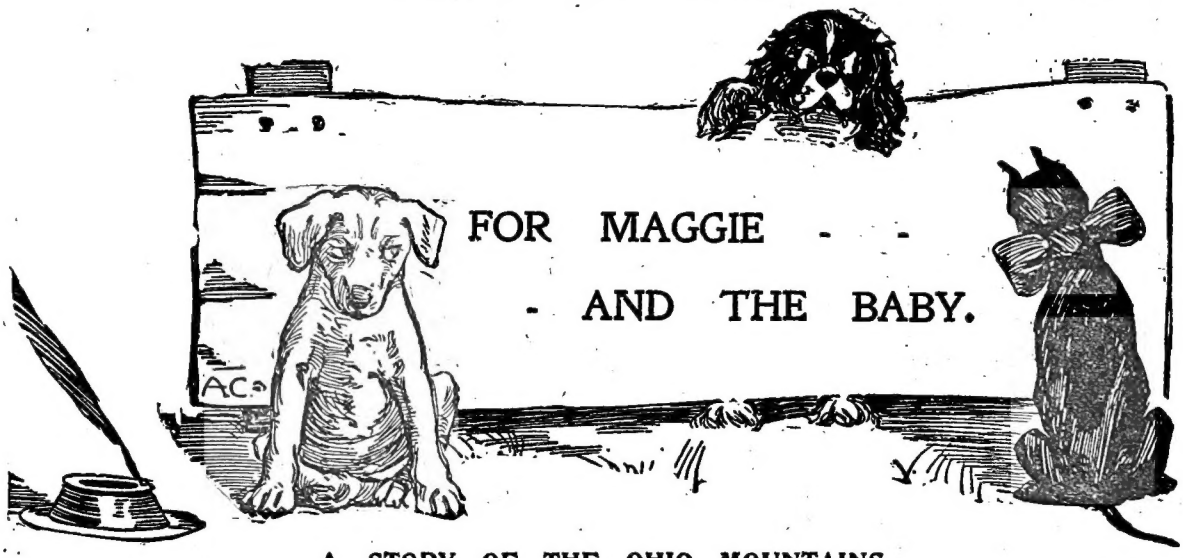

A STORY OF THE OHIO MOUNTAINS.

He came up the mountain road at nightfall trudging forward wearily, and coughing now and then a heavy, hollow cough that told its own story.

There were only two houses on the mesa, stretching shaggy and sombre from the base of the mountains to the valley below.

Two unpainted, red-wood dwellings, with their clumps of trailing pepper trees and tattered bananas, mere specks of civilisation against a stern background and mountain sides.

The traveller stopped before one of them, bowing awkwardly as the master of the house came out.

"Mr. Brand, I believe?"

Brand looked keenly into the stranger's face.

Not a bad face, certainly; sallow and drawn with suffering, one of those hopelessly pathetic faces, barely saved from the grotesque by a pair of dull, wistful eyes.

Not that James Brand saw anything either grotesque or pathetic about the man.

"Another sickly-looking stranger outside, Barbara, wants to try the air up here. Can you keep him? Or perhaps Mrs. Fox will give him a berth."

Mrs. Brand shook her head in wifely meditation.

"No, Mrs. Fox can't, that's certain. She has an asthma and two bronchitises there now. What's the matter with him, Jim?"

The stranger's hoarse, resonant cough answered.

"Keep him? To be sure. You might know I'd keep him, Jim; the night air's no place for a man with a cough like that. Bring him into the kitchen."

The new-comer spread his bony hands over Mrs. Brand's cheery fire, and the soft, dull eyes followed her movements wistfully.

His name was Brice. He had been in a mill explosion and had had a narrow escape. He had been ordered to try a change of air, and later he would look out for a job.

In answer to the question whether he was married, he pulled out a small black case.

Brand took the little rusty affair in his hands reverently. A woman's face—not grand nor fair even—some bits of tawdry finery making its plainness plainer, and beside it a round-eyed boy plumped into a high chair, with two little feet sticking out sturdily. Mrs. Brand looked over her husband's shoulder with kindly curiosity.

"Yes, that's Maggie and the boy," fighting the conscious pride in his voice like one who tries to wear his honours meekly. He took the well-worn case again, gazing into the two faces an instant with helpless yearning, and returned it to its place. The way he handled it was a caress, fastening the little brass hook with scrupulous care.

"I'll be sendin' for 'em when I git a little better o' this cough."

A very quiet, unobtrusive guest Mrs Brand found the man Brice; talking little save in a sudden gush of confidence, and always of his wife and child; choosing a quiet corner of the kitchen in the chilly nights, where he watched his hostess' quick movements with wistful admiration.

"Try hunting, Brice. The doctor says it's healthy."

And Brice tried hunting as Brand advised. Taking the gun from its crotch over the door after breakfast, and wandering for hours in the yellow, wine-like air of the mesa, he came in at noon and nightfall always empty-handed, yet no one derided his failure. There was something about the man that smothered derision.

Mrs. Brand had always an encouraging word for the weary-looking hunter. "Greasewood's bad for huntin'. Jim says it don't pay to look for quail in the brush when he does fetch 'em down."

"Like enough, ma'am. I've had a good many shots at the little wild things, but they turn their heads so innocent like. A man as has been blowed up once ain't much at separatin' families. I s'pose it ain't the shootin' by itself that's healthy, but the air——"

Whether the doctors were right or whether it was the mingled resin and honey of the sage and chaparral, no one cared to ask. Certain it is that the bothering cough yielded a little and the bent form grew a trifle more erect. He followed Brand from the table one morning, stopping outside, his face full of patient eagerness.

"I'm gettin' strong, neighbour. There's odd jobs you could gi' me. I'd be slow, perhaps, but seems as if

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anything 'ud be better 'n this continual doin' nothing."

"Fox and I was sayin' yesterday we'd like to put another man on the ditch," replied Brand. "It'll be easy work for a week till we strike the rock again. Then there's the greasewood. It's always on hand. You might take it slow when you was able. We'll find you jobs enough, man."

The scarred, colourless face brightened.

And so Price went to work on the ditch, gently at first, spared from the heaviest work by strong arms and rough kindliness.

And, ere long, another rude dwelling went up on the mesa, the blue smoke from its fireside curling slowly towards the pine-plumed mountain tops.

Brice had asked permission to build it, as he would have a little cash left after paying Mrs. Brand, and he hoped to settle there. The building fund, scant enough at best, was unexpectedly swelled by a sudden and obstinate attack of forgetfulness which seized good Mrs. Brand.

"No, Brice, you haven't made me any extra work, and I'm sure you've paid your way twice over, bringin' in wood and grindin' coffee and the like."

One day Brice came to Brand with a letter and a motley collection of coins—the savings from his wages. He wanted the money and letter sent to his wife, so that she could come and take up her quarters with him. And every day after that he was asking how long it would be before she arrived.

The southern winter blossomed royally. Bees held high carnival in the nodding spikes of the white sage, and now and then a breath of perfume from the orange groves in the valley came to mingle with the wild mountain odours. Brice worked every moment with feverish earnestness, and the pile of gnarled roots on the clearing grew steadily larger. With all her loveliness, Nature failed to woo him. What was the exquisite languor of those days to him but so many hours of patient waiting? The dull, hungry eyes saw nothing of the lavish beauty about them, looking through it all with restless yearning to the direction where he knew that a train, with its dust and dirt and noisome breath crawled over miles of alkali, or hung from dizzy heights.

"To-morrow's the third, neighbour, I expect she'll be here now, direckly."

"That's a fact; what a rattler time is." The days had not been long to Brand. "We'll go in to-morrow, and if they don't come, you can stay and watch the trains awhile. She won't know you, Brice, you've picked up so."

"I think Maggie will know me if she comes."

But she did not come. Brand returned the following night alone, having left Brice at cheap lodgings near the station. Numberless passers-by must have noticed the patient watcher of the incoming trains, the homely pathos of his face deepening day by day. The dull eyes growing a shade duller, and the awkward form a trifle more stooped with each succeeding disappointment. It was two weeks before he reappeared again on the mesa, walking wearily like a man under a load.

"I'm a'raid there's something wrong, ma'am. I come out to see if your husband would write me a letter."

So Brand wrote a letter to Brice's former employer, making the minutest inquiries regarding Mrs. Brice, and giving every possible direction concerning her residence. Then Brice fell back into the old groove, working feverishly in spite of Mrs. Brand's kindly warnings. "I can't stop, ma'am; doin' nothin' 'ud kill me."

The answer came at last, a business-like epistle addressed to Brand. Mrs. Brice had left about the time designated. Several of her neighbours remembered

"I stood and watched."

that a stranger, a well-dressed man, had been at the house for nearly a week before her departure, and the two had gone away together. The writer regretted his inability to give further information, and closed with kindly inquiries concerning his former employee's health and earnest commendation of him to Mr. Brand.

Brand read the letter aloud. Brice listened without a word, then he got up heavily, staggering a little as he crossed the door, and went out into the yellow sunlight. There was the long, sun-kissed slope, the huge pile of twisted roots, the rude shanty with its clambering vines. The humming of bees in the sage went on drowsily. Life, infinitely shrunken, was life still. A more cultured grief might have swooned or cried out. This man knew no such refuge; even the poor relief of indignation was denied him. None of the thousand wild impulses that come to men smitten like him flitted across his clouded brain. He only knew to take up his burden and go dumbly on.

No one spoke of the blow that had fallen upon him. The sympathy that met him came in the warmer clasp of hard hands and the softening of rough voices, none the worse certainly for its quietness.

Happily, it all came to an end one afternoon. Brice was at work on the ditch again, preferring the cheerful companionship of Brand and Bert Fox to his own thoughts, and Mrs. Brand was alone in the kitchen. Two shadows fell across the worn threshold, and a weak, questioning voice brought the good woman to her door instantly.

"Good-day to you, ma'am. Is there a man named Brice livin' here anywhere?"

It was a woman's voice, a woman with some bits of

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tawdry ornament about her, and a round eyed boy clinging bashfully to her skirts. Mrs. Brand brought them into the house, urging the stranger to rest a bit and get her breath.

"Thank you, ma'am: I'd like to be movin' on. Do you know if he's well—the man Brice? We're his wife an' boy."

The woman told her story presently, when Mrs. Brand had induced her to wait there until the man came home—told it with no unnecessary words, and her listener made no comment.

"My brother came a week before we was leavin', an' helped us off an' come part of the way. He had been doin' well, and he gave me some money. I was took ill on the road—I don't remember just where—an' they left me at a town with a woman named Dixon. She took care o' me. I was out o' my head a long time, an' when I came to I told 'em to write to Brice, an' they did, an' I suppose they took the name of the place frum the ticket. I was weak for a long time, an' they kep' a writin' and no word come, an' then I recollected about the town on the ticket—and then I couldn't think o' the place I'd sent the letters to before, an' the thinkin' worrited me, an' the doctor said I mustn't try. So I just waited, an' when I got to the town I kep' askin' for a man named Brand, till one day somebody told me."

Mrs. Brand told her husband about it that evening.

"I just took the two of 'em up to the shanty, and opened the door, and you'd a cried to see how pleased she was with everything. And I told her to kindle a fire and I'd fetch up a bit of supper. And when I'd carried it up and left it, I just come back and stood and watched till I saw Brice coming home. He was walking slow, as if his feet was a dead weight, and when he took hold of the door he stopped a minute, lookin' over the valley kind o' wishful an' hopeless. She heard him come, for she opened the door, and I turned round and came in. 'Barbara Brand,' says I, 'you've seen enough. If God wants to look at that I suppose He has a right to; nobody else has, that's certain.'"

Adam Heath.

Louis Hammond, who made himself famous catching counterfeiters for the Government, now manages an agency of his own. He is a stout and jovial person, with round eyes that beam through gold-rimmed glasses.

To the presence of this personage was ushered in, about one o'clock of a May afternoon, a young man of a rather commonplace appearance, dressed as well as need be, and seemingly about as intelligent as the average citizen.

"If you can spare a few minutes," he said, "I'd like to tell you about a queer thing that has just happened to me. I think, perhaps, you'd like to do something about it."

Hammond nodded, and bade him be seated.

"My name is George Weyland," the visitor said. "I work at a builder's near here. At twelve to-day I went over to Reid's billiard rooms and played a game with a friend. I took off my coat because it was warm in there, and after the game I put on another fellow's coat by mistake.

"He was playing at the next table to mine, and I had hung my coat on the next peg to his. When I got the coat on it felt awkward, and, to make sure that it was mine, I pulled some papers out of the inside breast pocket as I was walking towards the door. They weren't my papers, and I was just about to put them back when my eye fell on a folded sheet of letter paper, on which a name was written over and over again. The name was Henry Stanhope."

"Well?" said the detective, as Weyland paused.

"Of course you know Stanhope."

"Everybody does," responded Hammond. "The man who inherited old James Stanhope's money cuts too large a figure, even in this city, to remain altogether unknown."

"I was reminded of old Stanhope's money," continued Weyland, "when I saw that sheet of paper, and I'll tell you why. The name, as written on the top of that sheet, was a real signature, and all the others were imitations. I saw it at a glance. When Stanhope signs his name he makes a peculiar twist in the tail of the p. The imitator was trying to learn that in particular."

"How much time did you spend in studying that paper?" asked Hammond.

"About half a minute," was the reply. "Then I put it back where it came from, and went back and changed coats again. Just as I hung up the wrong coat the other fellow noticed it. He didn't seem to care. He put his coat on and started away, having finished his

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game. When he was half way to the door he took that batch of papers out of his breast pocket, and when his eye lit on the one I mentioned, he started, and turned quickly to look at me. I pretended not to see him. Then he put the paper back into his pocket and went on. Naturally I followed him. He and the fellow that he'd been playing with went over to the 'Bagdad' and ordered lunch in the small dining room. I came here at once," he continued. "I have heard more or less about you, of course. It struck me that perhaps you might recognise this fellow as a thief if you took a look at him. You know all the forgers, and this certainly looks like a forgery plot."

There was a peculiar smile on the detective's face.

"What did this fellow look like?"

"About my height," was the reply; "perhaps thirty years old; large-featured face, long, brown moustache."

"We'll take a look at him," said Hammond, with a peculiar, faint chuckle. "I was just going over there to lunch myself."

On the way Hammond continued to smile more and more broadly. Just as they were entering Hammond asked:

"Did anyone in the billiard room know this fellow?"

"I—I really didn't have time to inquire," said Weyland, blushing.

The two men were still in the dining room when Weyland and the detective entered. Presently the smile which Hammond had worn since they left the office became a silent but particularly joyous laugh.

"By the way," said Hammond at last, "I recognise your friend. He is Henry Stanhope."

"I think the lunches ought to be paid for by me," Weyland said good-naturedly, but Hammond wouldn't hear of it, and he forced the young man to partake of a very excellent repast. When it was finished they parted on the best of terms.

Weyland walked slowly away from the "Bagdad." He felt angry and ashamed, yet he was not ready to admit that he had been absurd.

"If Hammond could only have seen that sheet of paper," he said to himself over and over again. "It was an attempt to copy a signature. Of course, Stanhope can't forge his own name."

Urged by an impulse not altogether blind, but rather the product of a deep conviction, Weyland wended his way towards Stanhope's office. He passed upon the way a tall, gaunt man of fifty, who panted painfully, and laid his hand upon his breast, wherein the seeds of death were ripening fast. The next moment Weyland was in the hall of Stanhope's office.

"I have a note," he said to a clerk who came leisurely forward, "for Mr. Henry Stanhope, but it is not for the head of this firm. Is there anybody else here of the same name, or do you know of anyone?"

"Never heard of anybody else of that name," was the reply.

"Perhaps it's for me," said a voice, and Weyland turned to see the man whom he had passed just a short distance from the office.

The young man's heart leaped in his bosom.

"I expect it's for you," he said. "Come out into the hall and I'll give it to you, and also a message."

Two days later, at about the hour of his first appearance there, Weyland called upon Detective Hammond.

"I have found my forger," said he calmly.

"Have you, indeed?" rejoined the detective cheerily. "I'm delighted to hear it. Who is he?"

"Henry Stanhope!" replied Weyland firmly. "The man that we saw yesterday is a distant cousin of the same name, whose claim to a slice of old James Stanhope's property under his very peculiar will has never been properly adjusted. Young Stanhope, or his lawyer for him, drew up an agreement for his cousin to sign. It was a fraud, and the cousin wouldn't sign it. If he had he would have given up £40,000 for about £1,000. So young Stanhope proposed to sign it himself."

"Rather dangerous, wasn't it?" queried Hammond. "Of course, it would have been forgery."

"He wouldn't have been alive to do it," replied Weyland. "His days are numbered. He is far gone with consumption. Stanhope intended to produce the paper only after his cousin's death."

"How did you learn this?" demanded the detective.

"From Stanhope himself," said Weyland quietly.

"The dickens you did! I'd like to know how."

For answer, Weyland detailed his meeting with the claimant, and told how he had struggled to gain the man's confidence, and had succeeded. Then, together, they had called upon Stanhope, and asked for the agreement, saying that the claimant was ready to sign it. As Stanhope had already forged the signature, he could not produce the document, and he lacked the news to claim that his cousin had already signed it.

"Then," said Weyland, "I accused him of the thing point blank. I told him of the paper that I had seen in his pocket. I said I would have him arrested on the spot with the papers in his pocket, and I asked him incidentally if he had noticed you and me at lunch in the same room with him after the incident. At the mention of your name he trembled. From that moment he treated me as one of your staff, and, to make a long story short, before we left him he had executed an agreement by which his cousin got his rights."

* * * * * *

"Have you seen her?"

"I saw her last evening," replied Weyland blushing. "She is a very charming girl."

"And the property is considerable," said Hammond, smiling. "A very pretty romance it would make. And so," he added, "young Stanhope thought you were one of my men?"

"It was on his own responsibility. I didn't tell him so."

"Would you like to be?" asked Hammond.

"I would indeed."

"Then it is settled," said the veteran detective, "provided we can agree upon a stipend."

And he beamed upon the young man in his most cheery and amiable fashion.

ERNEST RICHMOND.

AUNTIE: "A penny for your thoughts."

Little Nephew: "I was thinking that if I kept quiet and pretended to be thinking you'd wonder what I was thinking about, and say just what you did. Hand over the penny!"

THE Bishop of Wurzburg once asked a sprightly little shepherd boy:

"What are you doing here, my lad?"

"Tending swine."

"How much do you get?"

"One florin a week."

"I am also a shepherd," continued the Bishop, "but I get much more pay."

"Then I suppose you have more swine under your care," innocently replied the boy.

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THE HONEST POSTMAN.

"A wild day, Marcaille," said the postmistress to the letter-carrier, who had just come in.

"Wild indeed, Madame Lefevre," replied Marcaille.

As he spoke he shook out his old cloak all wet with the rain, while the postmistress sorted the letters.

"There! that is done," she said. "But warm yourself before you start out."

Marcaille threw down his leather bag, black and shiny in spots, and came close to the roaring stove.

He was a little, wiry, tough-looking man. His face browned by sun and wind, was as wrinkled as an old apple.

His nose was a little too red, his eyes sparkled, his mouth was smiling; it was a good face that called forth friendly words and cordial hand-grasps. His moustache had a military ferocity, and on his blue blouse, with its red collar, a worn scrap of yellow and green ribbon told all his past:

Drawn in the draft, seven years of service, re-enlisted, petty officer, wounded at Alma, wounded at Solferino, honourably discharged.

Then Marcaille had been given the place of postman on the Champagnole route—four hundred francs a year, pension of one hundred francs, making a total income of five hundred francs.

And for ten years, for five hundred francs, Marcaille made twice a day, morning and evening, his round:

Cize, Pillemoine, le Vaudioux, Châtelnuef, Maisonneuve and Siane, a circuit of seven leagues in all weathers.

With his five hundred francs he took care of a wife and four children; the eldest was six.

But Marcaille had acquired the bad habit of a little "taste," as he called it.

In every village he had old acquaintances, almost friends.

In every house he found, in exchange for the letter he brought, a glass of wine that seemed to him to put strength into his heart and his legs. His nose grew a little redder; it even happened once that he lost a letter; not a very important one, fortunately, but it might have taught him a lesson.

"Here they are, Marcaille," said Madame Lefevre; "two letters for Cize, one for Pillemonie, one for le Vaudieux—nothing for Châtelneuf."

"That's good," said Marcaille. That "nothing for Châtelneuf" spared him a league and a half of rough walking.

"For Siane," went on Madame Lefevre, "pay attention! A registered letter!"

"It is not the first."

"No, but——" and Madame held up a great envelope bristling with stamps and notices, besides which spread out, like blots of blood, five enormous red seals.

"That's nothing worth caring for," said Marcaille laughing. "Who is it?"

"For monsieur the Mayor."

"Well, it will go through his hands, never fear."

"Not more than through yours," said Madame.

"No, but more of it will stick to his."

With this philosophic reflection, Marcaille dropped the letter into his leather bag, which he buckled carefully. He put on his cloak and opened the door.

"And above all," cried Madame after him, "don't begin Easter time too soon!"

"Don't be afraid!" and Marcaille was in a moment out of sight.

The cold pinched sharply; the piercing wind blew up little whirlpools of rain. Marcaille jogged along briskly, muttering:

"Not much Easter! A mouthful for six and a glass of water! But, after all, there are those who have nothing."

"Hullo, Marcaille!" cried suddenly a rough voice.

Marcaille turned.

"A glass of wine?" said the voice.

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"Hum!" grumbled Marcaille to himself; "attention, registered letter!" Then, aloud, "I'm late now; no, thank you!"

The window of the "Pineapple" public-house, which had opened, closed again, and Marcaille, proud of the victory over himself, went whistling out of the village. In the branches the wind whistled with its plaintive or menacing modulations, and its vague accompaniment to Marcaille's whistling.

"This rascally sack," he grumbled. "How heavy it is! I would have done better, after all, to stop at the Pineaapple. One glass of white wine is no killing matter. Yes, but then when a fellow takes one he takes two, and then away he goes! Brrrr! I was warmer than this in Africa. I can't feel my hands at all."

Marcaille stopped, put down his bag, and beat vigorously upon his sides with both arms. He drew in a long breath of icy air, and exhaled it with a breath that was much like a sigh, and trudged on again. Five minutes after he was at Cize and ringing at the door of the fine big house of the ironmaster.

"It is Father Marcaille."

"Hullo, Marcaille!"

"Have you got some letters?"

The children swarmed round him. He came up the outside steps, and the dancing youngsters pulled and pushed him to the door of the drawing-room. There, even as he let himself be pushed along, Marcaille thought:

"Attention, old fellow, registered letter."

Around him were happy voices and bursts of laughter. In the middle of the room the ironmaster and his wife were amusing the children in the warm and fragrant atmosphere, before a crackling fire, while outside the wind rattled the windows and whistled down the chimneys.

"A glass of wine, Marcaille?" said the friendly mistress of the house.

Marcaille gulped down a great sigh. Then he said: "Thank you, madame; not to-day."

This was indeed courage! To refuse a glass of wine in such weather, when he had still three good leagues up the mountain before him. But how light he felt when he proudly resumed his journey. He felt light, but his bag felt heavier than ever, never had it weighed so upon his shoulders.

"This rascally bag!" he grumbled. "It is that letter. What can be in it? if it should be bank-notes, judged by the weight, there should be a fortune. This rascally bag!"

Marcaille stopped. Decidedly this wouldn't do. The strap cut into his shoulder; he took off his cloak, changed it to the other shoulder and started off again. But things seemed no better. The road always seemed less long when he had had a glass of wine, at the "Pineapple," or elsewhere.

The cold, which he seldom noticed, made him shiver and groan. And then the wind whistling through the trees sounded so doleful.

And still grumbling: "The rascally bag!" and whistling at intervals, he went down towards Pillemoine. Below him stretched the valley, lost in the shadow; dotted here and there with lights, for the night was almost black. But he knew every village and every house, and in the blackness he recognized far away the house of the ironmaster, with every window lighted up, The joyous scene passed again before his eyes—the flaming fire, the cake on beautiful plates, the children dancing around their smiling parents.

"Yes, yes," murmured Marcaille. "There are some lucky people in the world. They have money, all they want, and with money one can do anything. Just get a little and its like a snowball; it rolls up bigger and bigger. Some have all, and others have none. There they are by the fire, and I'm out here in the rain. And what they spend for their amusement to-night I couldn't earn in a year. And yet they say God is just!"

Why did these ideas come to him?

He had never envied anyone. Why, then, did he stop and gaze fiercely at the lights shining below him.

He shook himself together.

"Forward, Marcaille!" he cried, "forward march!"

But the wind whistled and moaned in the pine-trees like a crying baby, and Marcaille, passing in thought from the ironmaster's house to his own, saw his four little ones gathered round their mother, by a scanty fire of faggots; he saw them searching in the cupboard for a forgotten bread-crust; he saw them going to sleep, all four on the same little wretched straw mattress. Oh poverty, poverty, it is hard! And to think that right here, in this bag——

"Registered letter!" he thought. "If it should be bank-bills! Imbecile! It is for the Mayor. It comes from the prefecture. It is probably only papers, and they register it and put on those big seals for a grand effect. Yes, but—if it should be bank-bills!"

He stopped short, perspiring, his forehead damp, and said suddenly, aloud, breaking the sombre silence:

"Well, and what then? If it should be bank-bills, what is that to you?"

His face flushed red at the thought that had crossed his mind.

"I haven't drunk anything, either," he murmured, with a shudder.

He entered Pillemoine.

At the door of a peasant's house he knocked.

A window opened.

"Oh! It is Marcaille. Come in!"

He went in.

"What ails you," asked the man. "You're pale. Have a glass of wine."

"No, no, thanks," said Marcaille, in a dull voice.

In rebuckling his bag he had felt the registered letter brush the tips of his finers.

The man had taken a glass; he held the bottle, all ready to pour.

"No," repeated Marcaille. And without another word he hurried out.

The ends of his fingers seemed to burn at the remembrance of the red seals.

Bank-bills, as many as there were there, how many things one could buy with them. A good house, like the ironmaster's, warm clothes, flannels! And what dinners! Rich—with what was in that letter one would be rich.

He began to whistle, but his breath failed him, and he felt his legs trembled beneath him. Without intending to, without wishing to, he had unbuckled the bag, he had taken out the letter, and in the half-light reflected from the snow he saw, like drops of blood, the five great red seals.

"Am I going mad?" he cried. "I have drunk nothing!"

He stood up at his full height, staring at the letter.

"I am an honest man," he said.

Then he put the letter back in his bag with an angry

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gesture, and marched on with a measured step, striking with his heel and counting as he used to do in the regiment when the march was long: "One, two; one, two."

The regiment! Ah! how far away it was at that time. How poor they seemed to him now, the brave joys of the soldier, which had made his heart beat for fourteen years. What a fool he was to enlist! Fighting in the field, hard fare in the camp, suffering in the ambulance. His medal! Great things, indeed. A bit of ribbon on his blouse. How much better he would have done to start out, like his brother, to seek his fortune.

"It was by this road he went," thought Marcaille, as he started across the great road to Geneva, whose white length to his right stretched along by the forest of Siane, "by this road."

That long white road, he had only to travel along it—and he stopped.

"The frontier," he thought, "is quite near. Ten leagues, what is that? Taking time to go for the wife and children one could be there by to-morrow morning. And once there, one is safe. The Mayor is not expecting this letter. If people missed us to-morrow, they would think something had happened to me in the night, that I had fallen into a hole or something, and that my wife was looking for me. Suspect me? Oh, no! Marcaille is an honest man, an honest man!"

The sweat stood on his brow.

Panting with eyes fixed on that white line which lost itself in the night, he repeated in a low voice:

"An honest man"

His hand slipped under his cloak, unbuckled the leather bag, and trembled as it touched the five red seals.

"Yes, but if I were wrong," he murmured; "if there were only papers in it."

Quickly he took the letter and felt it carefully to find out its secrets.

But the envelope was thick and hard, the paper crackled under his fingers with a little dry noise that sounded formidably loud, while the night wind whistled in his ears:

"Thief! thief! thief!"

"Who said Marcaille was a thief?" he cried, with a fierce gesture.

Then, seeing he was all alone, he came to himself and fell at the side of the road, crouching, his head in his hands, and murmuring:

"This is frightful! But I have drunk nothing."

Slowly he reopened the leather bag and slipped in the letter; slowly he rose; slowly still he crossed the road.

It seemed as if an implacable, invisible hand held him fast to the spot from which he would have hurried away.

The road to Siane was straight before him; a half-hour more and he should have finished his round, the letter would be given to the Mayor, and he would be safe.

"Come, Marcaille," he cried, "on with you!"

But no: he remained motionless on that fatal road that led to the frontier. And for the third time, carried away by irresistible temptation, he drew from the bag the registered letter, saying:

"I must know what is in it."

Very carefully with the point of his knife he raised one corner of the envelope enough to slip in his finger, and draw up one of the papers it contained. The task was a delicate one; he must go slowly, very slowly, in order to tear nothing. If it were only papers!

The night wind whistled in his ears: "Thief! thief! thief!"

But he did not hear it. He thought only of one thing: to know what was in that letter. He had only one fear, of not succeeding or of deceiving himself. At last he got hold of a corner of the enclosure. He took a match lit it, and by its light saw a bank-note.

It was really bank-notes. His head swam. The envelope was heavy, the sum must be enormous. He was about to tear it open to count it, but again he stopped.

"Let me see, let me see," he thought, "I need not hurry. I must plan out everything. I will tell Genevieve that we are going away. She will begin to ask questions. She will want to know everything. Bah! I will make up a story. I will tell her—but she will not believe me. Would she consent? Yes, yes, she must. To be rich, isn't that before everything? Are there not hundreds and thousands whom all the world bows down to who began just this way? Not to be caught, that is all. We will put the babies into the little cart. By daybreak we will be at the frontier. The gendarmes know me—don't they know that Marcaille is an honest man?"

He laughed convulsively as he said this, and again he heard the wind whistling in his ears:

"Thief! thief! thief!"

He folded the registered letter, and instead of replacing it in the leather bag, slipped it into his pocket.

It was his.

Then, with a strident voice, he cried out:

"Forward, Marcaille, forward. You are a rich man."

But he had hardly taken a step forward when his voice died in his throat.

Behind him, on the road he had just left, he heard voices clear and piercing.

It was like the indistinct murmur of a crowd.

Marcaille shivered.

Was he already suspected? Had his trouble betrayed him? Was he pursued?

He listened attentively.

The bells of the church at Vaudioux commenced to strike, slowly at first, then louder, calling to mass the good people of Châtelneuf, of Maisonneuve, and of Pillemoine.

Marcaille trembled with convulsive shivers.

Every stroke of the bell sounded in his ears and in his heart, and seemed to buzz in his head.

Then suddenly he burst into tears and buried his face in his hands.

"Oh, misery," he cried, "I had drunk nothing."

Reason came back to him, and with it a realisation of his incomplete crime.

And it was no longer the wind, it was the voices of his wife and children, it was the pealing of that bell, that had accused him.

"Thief!" replied the sombre depths of the forest.

Terrified, he tried to leave the voices behind him by running faster and still faster. And then a dizziness seized him. He knew not why he ran. Someone was after him, that was all. But who? His conscience or the gendarmes, he knew not which. Where was the danger? Everywhere.

In the shadows, to the right and to the left, he saw everywhere vague forms which followed him; the branches bent low over his head like arms to stop him. Wildly he ran along, the blood throbbing in his temples; then suddenly fell heavily in a dead faint.

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When he came to himself he was lying before the fire in his own room. Genevieve and the children were kneeling and crying beside him. He did not see them. The people of Siane, who, coming from the mass, had found him, were there also. He did not see them.

"The letter? the letter?" he cried.

With one bound he sprang to the leather bag which had been thrown on the ground in the corner.

It was empty!

"The letter! the letter!" he cried.

Then remembered, and drawing from his pocket the big envelope with the five red seals—still unbroken—he rushed out like a madman, straight to the Mayor's.

"A registered letter!" he cried.

"Oh, indeed!" said the Mayor, laughing. "What a state you are in. One would think you had come to ask pardon for a condemned criminal."

"Well they might," said Marcaille. "But take the letter first. It is a little soiled—I fell down—I——"

His lie strangled him.

"A drop too much," said the Mayor.

"No, I had drunk nothing," said Marcaille quietly, "and it is just for that reason that I have brought you my resignation."

The Mayor had broken the seals, examined the bank-notes and glanced over the accompanying letter.

"Your resignation?" said he. "Well, I should think so—I can understand that."

"Ah! you know——"

"I know you are rich, my good fellow."

Was this a joke, or had the Mayor in some way looked into his conscience and read the whole story?

Marcaille became pale at the thought.

"Rich?" he murmured.

"Why, yes, there is no doubt about that. This letter tells me of the death of your brother, Jean Marcaille, who died at Toulouse, where he resided, on the eighth of this present month. According to his last wishes, all he possessed has been disposed of by Michael Dulac, notary of that city, who sends to me the amount of twenty-four thousand francs, which I am instructed to hand over to you."

"Ah!" said Marcaille, overwhelmed, as he took mechanically into his hand the big envelope that the Mayor offered him: "Jean is dead, and I am rich!"

Then, after a moment of silence:

"It makes no difference," he murmured, so low that the Mayor could not hear him; "I should have been a thief just the same!"

Then, turning, he added, loud enough this time:

"But I am still an honest man, thank God!"

"No one ever doubted it, Marcaille," said the Mayor. "But take my advice and be more careful. A glass of wine too much goes to your head, and you might fare worse another time."

"You are right, sir," said Marcaille, and he went off whistling, with his head in the air.

Was Marcaille an honest man?

I should say so! T. E. H.

"My sister has lost her voice and we've tried every doctor in town."

"That so? Then try her with a mouse."

"Pa, is it right to call a man born in Poland a Pole?"

"Of course, my child."

"Well, then, if a man is born in Holland, is he a hole?"

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HOMESPUN YARNS.

By Levin Carnac.

IV.—OLD MARK'S ENGINE-GHOST.

A FEW years ago I was one of a party of half a dozen tourists who had got off the cars at Denver to spend a day or so looking round the famous mines whose deep shafts have swallowed up so many fortunes and so many lives, repaying the former with interest, but demanding unceasing toll of the latter in exchange for the silver treasures that they yield up.

Our guide was a typical miner of the old style, a sort of remnant of the roaring times of '49, when men had only just begun to suspect that these rugged hills and rocky valleys contained the millions that have been taken out of them since then. He knew everything about a mine, from the lowest gallery to the top of the engine-house shaft, and he was as full of mine-lore as the Comstock was of paying one.

When our day's sight-seeing was over, two or three of us who wanted to get the many fragments of anecdote dropped by our guide during the day spun into something like a connected yarn, coaxed the old man away into the smoking room of a small hotel, and informed him that whisky and cigars were duty free as long as he could contrive to stick to the truth and make it interesting to us. To which he solemnly replied:

"Gents, so far as square-toed true experiences of these mines goes, it's only the weakness of human natur' as would stop me reelin' 'em off as long as the tangle-foot held out; but I think as its gettin' a bit late, and as you've got to be on board early in the mornin', I can fix you up with one that'll give you something to dream about when you get to sleep. It's as true as gospel, too, so far as my knowledge of the matter goes.

"About five years ago we had a minder up yonder, on the Belcher, who was as curious a cuss as you'd meet with in a day's prospectin'. Though he was gettin' on in years, he was as smart and keen and plucky as any man on the mines, but he was superstitious from his boots to his hair, and that's what let him out at last, poor old chap.

"Old Mark was solid on everything but spooks, but about them he was a hopeless crank. He believed that his shaft was haunted, and that there could be ghosts working in engines just the same as round corpses, and graveyards, and old houses. I don't take much stock of them things myself, never having been a very heavy drinker, but Old Mark went his pile on them, and if any of you gents ever writes down what I'm tellin' you now, you can call this story, 'Old Mark's Engine-Ghost,' for that's just about what it comes to.

"One day I'd stopped by his engine-house to swap lies with him for a spell, when all of a sudden he held up his hand, and said to me in a sacred sort of whisper:

"'Sam, d'ye hear that?'

"'Hear what?' says I, going to the mouth of the shaft and peering down.

"'That holler, groanin', wailin' sorter noise among the ingines; that sound means death to someone down the mine at this moment.' As Mark said this, I saw his face grow white all in an instant, and his voice was just nowhere. He'd hardly got the words out of his mouth, when they rang up from the 2,000 foot level to hoist the cage. Mark gripped the lever, and sent the great reel spinning round, keeping his eye fixed on the indicator all the while and not making a sound.

"The hand pointed to the top level, when I heard, plain enough this time, a long, wailing scream come out of the machinery, just as though someone was being crunched up in it. Mark heard it too, and I saw his hand slip from the brake-lever for an instant. The cage shot up like lightning, and, before he could get the brake on again, jammed bang into the sheaves. The wire cable tautened under the strain for a moment, and then snapped like a thread. The cage dropped back to the shaft's mouth, and, as it fell, three of the chaps leapt out clear on to the timbers and saved themselves, the other two slipped on the slimy edge, and the dull 'thump, thump,' of their bodies, as they knocked from side to side of the shaft going down, stopped in my ears for a week after.

"That was Mark's last turn at that engine for many a long day. When an engineer lets his cage touch the sheaves he doesn't need to be told to go. He gets, without pay or notice; and not so long ago he thought himself lucky to get clear without any lead in his body. He was out of work for some weeks after that, living mostly on charity.

"Sometimes when he'd get hold of you and begin pitching his queer fancies the levelest headed man'd turn a bit queer over them, he seemed to believe them all so earnestly. He used to tell the boys as how engines is really living things, and get ill and low and merry and strong, and wants feeding and physicking just like other animals. And then he used to tell us about what he called the mysteries of the low levels down yonder in the dark, and how he'd seen doomed miners followed about the galleries by shadows which wasn't cast by any mortal light, and pointed at by the flames of their own lamps, until they got blasted into bits with a charge going off wrong, or were caved in and starved to death, or else got smashed up falling down the shaft like he had sent those poor fellows the day he went off his head.

"After a bit, people got to see that he was quite harmless, and someone gave him a job down below, and then he got worse and worse. 'Most every day when he came up from his shift he'd have some new horror to tell about that he had seen down in the levels.

"All this time, Old Mark was getting more and more down in the mouth. You see, he'd been the best engineer on the mine, and he'd lost his reputation. That worked on his mind, and made him so miserable, that a Chinee might have pitied him.

"One night, when he was off-shift, he turned into the South Consolidated engine-house, and sat, as he was very fond of doing, watching the machinery. All of a sudden, he caught the engineer by the arm, and said:

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Stood like a graven image, waiting for the cage to come up.

'Tom, I hear the death-moan in the wheels. Keep your ears open, something's going to happen soon.'

"The engineer was just going to order him out of the machine-house, when the signal for the quick hoist sent him to the lever, and a moment later the steel rope was flashing over the wheel like a streak of lightning. Presently a puff of smoke drifted up the throat of the shaft, and then came a shower of sparks. The mine was on fire.

"As the cage came clashing up to the landing-stage a crowd of half-naked men, blistered and choking, staggered off and reeled into the dressing-room. The cage was hardly empty before the signal to lower rang out, and it plunged back into the depths as though it had been dropped. Before it reached the bottom a big black cloud of smoke rolled up the shaft, and then came a sheet of flame that licked round the dry timbers and set them blazing like so much match-wood.

"Now came the signal to hoist again, and remember that the engineer hadn't only to bring the cage to the top. He had to stop it being smashed against the sheaves the same as Mark smashed it the day he went wrong. Well, just as that signal rang, a lump of timber fell and knocked Tom, the engineer, senseless. A dozen of us jumped for the lever, but Old Mark was there first, and, as he gripped it, he straightened up and looked a good two inches taller for the moment. A sort of instinct made us fall back, and then another rush of flame sent us staggering out of the engine-house.

"For a good two minutes Old Mark stood there in the flame and smoke waiting for the cage to come up. That hand of his on the hot lever held a dozen men's lives in its grasp, and there was no trembling about it now. Over that shaft-mouth, now belching out fire and smoke in clouds, he stood like a graven image, watching for the cage to come up.

"At last it came rattling up to the surface, and as it touched the level Mark jammed the lever hard down and stopped her true to an inch. Then with a cheer we jumped in and began dragging the fainting men out of the burning engine-house. We had got twelve men out alive, though badly burnt, and then with a crash and a roar of flame and smoke the whole shebang caved in and buried poor Old Mark and two others under a couple of tons of blazing timbers.

"Three days afterwards we dug them out, and there was the old man's charred body lying by the engine, with the right hand still gripping the lever.

"The next day three thousand men walked bare-headed after Mark Haverley's coffin, and nary man cussed aloud for a good week after.

"Ah, well, gentlemen," said our guide, as he tossed the last thimbleful down, "Old Mark was a curious sort o' chap with his spectres and engine-ghosts, but there was good leather in the man for all that."

Old Gentleman: "It is folly to talk of marriage for years yet. My daughter is a mere child. She knows nothing about the world, and could not manage servants."

Mr. Slimpurse: "Oh! that needn't make the slightest difference. We shan't have any."

Philanthropist: "Why are you crying so, my child?'

Little Girl: "Please, sir, me mudder sent me wid sixpence fer to git bread wid, an' I lost it in that there dark alle way. I'll be licked terrible."

Philanthropist; "Well, well, my poor child; dry your tears. Here is a match. Perhaps you will be able to find it."

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LOVE'S MADNESS

"Since you wish to know who I am," said Signor Cornelio, "let us go back, if not exactly to the deluge, at all events to the Norman invaders of Sicily.

"The expeditions of that race, you are aware, were noted for a certain violence and ferocity. Now my grandsire drew a genealogical tree proving my descent on the female side from a valiant knight and companion in arms of Robert Guiscard; and despite the mingling of Sicilian and Spanish blood with that of my ancestor, I remain a Norman; that is to say, restless, choleric and with a touch of the brigand.

"Without boasting, I may claim to have been the worst scholar in the college of Palermo. Rod and solitary confinement instead of taming, only irritated me the more. I lived like a pirate with masters and schoolmates, with one exception only, one pupil for whom I cherished a brotherly friendship.

"Pippino Castri was a gentle, yielding child, always the youngest and best boy in his class. His superior intelligence excited jealousy among his fellows, who gave him so many blows and used him so roughly that I commiserated his weak lot and took him under my protection, by which defence of the weak I redeemed somewhat my own bad conduct.

"College days ended, I was sent to the University of Catania, where I again met Pippino.

"Consistent with my past, I there fell out with the faculty, was insolent at examinations, and failed to obtain a degree, while my friend brilliantly completed his course.

"We returned together to Palermo; he a lawyer, and I professionless. But genuine Sicilian blood and Norman corsair instincts tingled in my veins, and I pitied my wise friend who sought to employ his talents in our island and keep close to shore like the barques that go to Cefalu.

"About that time a little Zingara on La Marina examined the palm of my hand and predicted that I should die dressed in all my clothes. Often recalling her prediction, I can declare that its non-fulfilment hitherto has been through no fault of mine.

"My father died when I was quite young, leaving me more than sufficient for the perpetration of many a madness; while my mother, re-marrying, let me shift for myself pretty much. To appease my vagabond cravings I planned a voyage to Malta and the African coast.

"Choosing three companions whose tastes were similar to my own and who would permit me to be their master, I hired a trading craft for a month, and with provisions, arms, and plenty of money, a high old time we had of it.

"After frolicking in Malta, Tripoli, and Tunis, one morning we landed on the island of Zerbi, without knowing where we were. In our efforts to make ourselves understood we wandered about till we came to a fountain where some damsels were drawing water.

"At sight of us the whole bevy of them fled. Hoping to hunt partridges or hares, we had brought our fowling pieces with us, and now I proposed to pursue a prettier kind of game.

"Away ran the maids up a steep path leading to their village on the hilltop; but one of them, less nimble than her mates, beholding us gain upon her, began to utter shrill cries, while the others spread the alarm through the village.

"A score of women presently came forth armed with pitchforks and staves, and vociferously threatened us; but one gun shot, sent twenty feet over their heads, completely routed them, so that we chased them into the very centre of the fig-tree planted in the village square, where, like a conqueror, I established my headquarters for the time being.

"An old man, familiar with a few Italian words, was commissioned to parley with us; but I assumed so arrogant an air that he soon went off grumbling. Some young Arab men, being now come from the fields, produced their rifles and a volley from a housetop sent my hat off my head. For safety we were obliged to break into a house, where we held them at bay for a while.

"Finally, after peppering a couple of them with shot, we forced them to raise the siege and permit us to retreat to the beach to the vocal strains of the grand march in Verdi's opera of 'I Lombardi.'

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"Unluckily, as our boat was pushing off from shore, a bullet from the hilltop struck me in the shoulder, and I returned to Palermo suffering greatly from the wound and uneasy as to the consequences of our escapade. Pippino Castri established himself at my pillow, lavish in his attentions and eloquent in his protests against my conduct.

"Reminding me of the Zingara's prophecy, he extorted from me a promise, easily obtained from a man weakened by bleedings and a diet of herb tea, that I would be wiser in future. Meanwhile, the Zerbi islanders made no fuss, deeming probably that no justice was to be obtained from dogs of Christians; and the adventure rather added lustre to my reputation.

"I spare you the recital of many subsequent follies. My fortune, under such sorry management as mine was, ere long required to recuperate; for one morning my overseer announced to me that, if I continued to draw from my coffer without reckoning, the day would soon come when I should be penniless. Determined to curtail my expenses, I sold my horses and carriage, and shouldering my gun, set forth to hunt in the mountains.

"Going afoot, living on what game I brought down, and roughing it in peasants' huts, I always slept well, because I was always thoroughly tired when night arrived. On my return to Palermo I had a chance to purchase a yacht at a moderate outlay, and presently became a mariner and fisherman of notable proficiency.

"Tunny, *spada* (swordfish) and *lacerto* (a kind of mackerel) had no more dangerous foe than I was. Absorbed in such occupations, I led an active and healthy life until a fatal meeting upset it all.

"It was in the spring of 18—. A merchant of Trapini, grown rich in the sulphur business, sold his mines to an English company and came to Palermo to enjoy his wealth. He had a handsome wife and one daughter, eighteen, or rather an angel of grace and loveliness. Her image is graven in lines of fire on my heart.

"Black as a raven's wing was her hair, her Niobe-like eyes were veiled by long lashes, her nose was delicate and straight, her mouth was set with pearl, and so gentle and sweet a face was hers that all other countenances seemed but masks in comparison.

"It was one Sunday in the Duomo that I first met the peerless maiden, with whom on the instant I fell in love. Her father, Don Massimo, was a good though somewhat avaricious man, whose wife's fondness for spending induced him to commit extravagances that his natural niggardliness did not warrant. Late arrivals in the capital, the family were eager to enter society, so that I easily obtained an introduction.

"Then I took the ladies out sailing in my yacht, and gained the good graces of the father by allowing myself to lose a few pieces at divers games of cards. And wisely did I act in presenting myself betimes; for as soon as the daughter was seen at the concerts in the public gardens, her beauty attracted attention and suitors came forward in great number.

"One evening in the walks of La Flora I seized the opportunity to say a few words about love. She listened with her head to one side, toying with a magnolia blossom. All at once she seemed to comprehend, and raising her large eyes, she gazed curiously at me.

"'Why, do you really love me, Signor Cornelio?' she inquired.

"Encouraged by the question, I frankly vowed my sentiments.

"'Oh, so much the better,' she exclaimed, with artless joy. 'It must be so amusing to be loved by a man like you. I hope at least that you are in earnest, and that you will not love only in words.'

"'Put me to the proof,' replied I. 'Must I conquer the entire island of Zerbi? Must I go to China? Must I descend amid the flames of a volcano? Command me, dispose of your slave, and never fear that I shall be daunted by any obstacle or any danger.'

"Such language, with its corsair-like tone, appeared to interest her.

"'No,' quoth she, smiling, 'you shall not descend into the flames of a volcano, unless I throw my handkerchief therein. We shall see how you divine and forestall my wishes. Do not conceal from yourself that others have expressed their love in choicer terms than you; but attentive deeds will touch me more deeply, and for them I shall give you credit. Among indications of a veritable passion there is only one that I dread and regard with horror—jealousy. Terrible examples are given of it. If you would inspire me with something gentler than fright, do not be jealous, Signor Cornelio. On this condition I may be able to love you some day.'

"'I will use every effort to comply therewith,' I replied, 'but if you do not mean to make a hopeless suitor of me you must grant me a fair place in your heart, so that my own may remain closed to jealousy. The preservative against this ugly evil is confidence. Promise me to be frank and loyal.'

"'I agree,' said Aurelia in a serious tone; 'there shall be no falsehood between us. As to the preference you desire, here, to begin with, is a little token. Were anyone to ask me for this flower, I should refuse to part with it; receive it as a pledge of friendship; but do not show it to anybody, for it has been seen in my hand.'

"I pressed the magnolia to my lips, and with precious carefulness placed it in my pocket.

"'Come, sir knight,' said the young lady, 'what are you going to achieve in my service?'

"'Anything that may please you,' I replied. 'My Norman ancestor and his comrade, Robert Guiscard, unhappily chased the Saracens from this land, or else I should propose to meet them in single combat.

"Here Don Massimo and his wife interrupted our conversation; but enough had been said to send me home burning with the first fever of love and hope.

"On the very next day Aurelia expressed in my hearing a desire for some Indian figs. This fruit, though abundant late in the summer, would not be in the Palermo market for a month yet. I set out for Noto, where the cactus is more forward than in this part of the island, and the dozen Indian figs that I triumphantly brought back with me were worth such smiles as I would not have surrendered for a treasure.

"Many an opportunity did I find to render Aurelia a service; but when I urged her to authorise me to demand her hand of her parents, she would answer in a scared way, 'Not yet.'

"One evening, amid a flutter of society's butterflies, Aurelia took extreme pleasure in listening to a description of the Monday balls at the Academy in Naples. The dandy who was engrossing my sweetheart's attention had noticed at one of those balls a *parure* composed of blue feathers at the base of the jay's wing. I conjectured that a fancy for a similar adornment was lurking in Aurelia's mind, and the caprice must be satisfied under penalty of forfeiting all the fruit of my past services.

"So I scoured the mountains in every direction, even the zone of Etna called La Nemorosa, and at the expiration of a month returned with a supply of blue

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jay plumage. I expected to be greeted as though I had snatched a duplicate of the Holy Tunic from the infidels but, alas! I was hardly thanked and my gift thrown into a corner.

"While I was off in the woods killing the poor birds, certain newcomers had been making themselves agreeable in the house of Don Massimo; among others I there met my old schoolmate, Pippino Castri. Although his Narcissus-like visage attracted the women, it never occurred to me that my dearest friend could become my rival, and to avoid such a danger I promised myself to make him the confidant of my love affairs.

"All Palermo, socially speaking, was just then preparing for the festival at Piana dei Greci—a religious ceremony according to the Greek ritual, to be followed by dancing and other amusements. The population of Piana, composed of Albanians, was to dress up in the national costume. Not until the night before the fête would Don Massimo, after much coaxing, consent to attend.

"Everybody present wished to make one of the party, and as all could not go in one carriage, I proposed hiring a hackney coach. But Don Massimo objected and said that the second-rate carriage should be harnessed up. In wealthy Palermiton households two conveyances are kept, one for display and for making calls; the other, old and faded, used at night, and drawn by sorry nags that one is not afraid to keep waiting at the doors of palaces and theatres. These vehicles are, generally speaking, antiquated berlins, and Don Massimo's, with its threadbare, velvet, broad body, and tarnished gilding, had in days of yore swayed beneath the weight of a cardinal or of some Spanish governor.

"As honorary coachman I was commissioned to drive the folks in this worthy vehicle. The elderly people took the calash, while the young members of the party piled into the old carriage.

"From my high driver's seat I could see them attack their luncheon with shouts and laughter; then they sung, and I recognised Aurelia's voice and a clapping of little hands when Pippino recited a rigmarole of rhymes.

"On reaching Piana, I remarked an unaccountable liveliness in the maiden's glances, and for the first time the serpent of jealousy stung my heart. Impatiently watching for an opportunity to get Aurelia by herself, I saw her at last drop behind the company on the way to the Greek church.

"When I approached her, she said eagerly: 'I must speak with you. You look for an explanation and you shall have it; for every minute's delay makes the matter worse. Arm yourself with courage, my good Cornelio, and remember I have not seriously engaged myself to you. After all the proofs of love received from you it is cruel, I confess; but it cannot be helped. Only now do I see clearly into my heart; I can never cherish any other sentiment for you than friendship.'

"'Why, what has happened?' I asked, trembling.

"'Simply this: I had many admirers in Trapini, who were exhaustless in praise of my beauty; they wearied me and I departed for Palermo with no regrets. While in this mood I heard of your expedition to Zerbi, and pleased with your audacity, I persuaded myself that a love expressed by deeds would amuse me far more than all the fine talk in the world. But my heart remained untouched, and now I have found out what power there is in language.

"'For there is language and language, my good Cornelio. One day when least expecting such a thing, while you were roaming over Etna, I received a sealed missive, containing, what do you suppose? A piece of verse of thirty-two stanzas all in praise of me, and all so pretty I could not tell which I preferred.

"'Ah, what think you of this new way of speaking? when was ever such speech addressed to a woman before?'

"'A hundred million times!' replied I wrathfully.

"'Spite leads you astray; I can understand and forgive you,' continued Aurelia; 'but how, tell me, could these thirty-two stanzas create such a dizziness of delight, so that at last I shut my eyes while a flaming sword seemed whirling before me? Nor must you imagine that I am called Aurelia—no, but Chloris. The poet knew that I should pierce the veil of mystery. But was ever woman called Chloris before when her name was Aurelia?'

"'Oh, often,' I answered. 'In France such fiddle-faddles are known as Chloris bouquets.'

"'Oh, then it would have been unpardonable in me,' cried Aurelia, 'if I had not pierced the veil. How ingenious though, in the gentle rhymer! Now, tell me in good faith, unless blind or crazy, could I do else than love him? So, my good Cornelio, you will, you see, act wisely in not thinking of me any more. Poetry, which I offended, has reasserted its rights.'

"'Well, I must say you are cool about it, you ungrateful, frivolous girl! Do you believe it will be an easy matter to forget you?'

"'Yes, to a generous, devoted heart such as yours! Besides, your sacrifice will mean the happiness of an amiable youth whose merits I have heard you extol.'

"'I will crush him,' I exclaimed, stamping my foot. 'I will crush the viper, that little traitor, Pippino.'

"'Alas! this is what I so dreaded, jealousy, vengeance! To crush his best friend! Oh, heart of bronze! And me, too, he will kill, no doubt. Ah, my good Cornelio, must one die for so light a fault?'

"Stifled by her sobs, Aurelia could say no more, and as I saw that a nervous attack was coming on, I took her hands and said: 'Be calm. I will kill no one.'

"Instantly her tears ceased to flow. 'Do you grant me life,' she asked, 'and Pippino also? Will you swear it?'

"'Yes.'

"'Oh, then I am happy!'

"'But I am not going to sacrifice myself to a young man's whim. I shall question Pippino, and woe be to him if he does not love you!'

"Before entering the church, I beckoned to Pippino to follow me. When he came near, he could not endure the look I gave him, and when I informed him how matters now stood between me and Aurelia, he exclaimed:

"'Ah, wretched me, what have I done! Why did you not confide in your friend, Cornelio? What shall we do?'

"Then, after a moment's silence, he added:

"'I am the one to suffer. I will go away from Sicily, and live in Naples, or rather die there; for if I give up Aurelia, my friend, I must die.'

"His unexpected resignation disarmed me.

"'Do not doubt, Pippino,' I replied, 'that I would let you go and die, were I the preferred lover; but the sad privilege of self-sacrifice belongs to me now.'

"My friend caught me round the neck, clasped me to his breast, and lavished the tenderest epithets on me, and when I had once more declared my renunciation, he

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ran off to be with the fair one, while I, regardless where I walked, made my way back to Palermo.

"I had thought I had courage to consummate the sacrifice, and had sincerely believed myself a hero; but soon jealousy clutched me by the throat, all my fine sentiments vanished, my friend became my rival again, Aurelia a perfidious wretch, and their happiness an unendurable outrage.

"Ominous pictures rose up before me; I imagined I had surprised the lovers in low murmured, intimate converse, I was preparing to stab them, when Aurelia's beauty unnerved me and I turned the blade against myself. That night I paced my chamber in delirious rage. Weariness and daylight calmed me somewhat, and I was about to throw myself on my bed and endeavour to fall asleep when Pippino entered.

"He stretched out his arms and called me his generous friend; but I abruptly interrupted him.

"'Keep your praises to yourself,' said I, 'they are out of place. I really cannot bring myself to renounce Aurelia. An end must be made of one or the other of us. Let us seek some means of meeting on an equal footing, for I would not take advantage of you.'

"Pippino had taken a few fencing lessons. I handed him a foil and bade him be on his guard; but he had not the strength to defend himself, and I dealt him three blows that he could not parry.

"In the handling of firearms I had even greater superiority. A duel was impossible. I bethought me of another expedient.

"Pippino being a good swimmer, I proposed that we should take a small boat, go outside the harbour, and capsize it in the offing, two miles from the shore.

"'Madman!' he ejaculated, 'if you heard me call in fainting tones for help, would you be so cruel as to let me perish? No, you would not. You would forget all about women, love and jealousy, and turn back to save the friend who loves you, and whom you aided and protected all through his childhood. Go to! A sanguinary and wicked combat is not what we require to end our difficulty; a nobler strife shall be ours, from which the vanquisher may come forth without remorse. If, as you say, it is true that you cannot give up Aurelia, then take her; I surrender her to you!'

"'Alas!' I returned, 'she does not love me.'

"'Well, will she love you any the more after you have killed me? If you must lose your sweetheart, at any rate keep your friend.'

"'Yes, I will keep him,' I cried, embracing Pippino; 'yes, I will preserve this friendship of childhood's days and it shall repay me for my sacrifice. Away with women and love! I brave them, I defy them, I anathematise them!

"'Get married, my dear boy! Wed the delightful, amicable, fickle creature whom Heaven has thrown in our way to tempt us to slay each other. The result of it all will be to render us sublime.

"'Aurelia is yours; and may I die at once if ever I again dispute your claim to her! I shall now look on her with a brow of marble and a breast of brass; for this heart of mine is at least master of itself, strong as a lion's and great as Cæsar's.'

"San Cornelia, my patron saint, is my witness that I spoke thus with the best faith in the world: while the praises, tears, and grateful expressions of my friend confirmed me in my magnanimous resolution, corroborated by vows which would render a reversion to my previous way of thinking impossible unless I chose to be a pitiful turncoat.

"Still, although self-denial is a very grand virtue, it is difficult for a man of my stamp to practise.

"After Pippino's departure, Aurelia's father paid me a visit, to reproach me for deserting his party on the previous evening. He, Don Massimo, had occupied my seat on the return, but had not proved so satisfactory a coachman as I. The ladies having taken a fancy to such country rides, a trip to Santa Flavia had been arranged for the following day, and they depended on me to drive the team—this was the command and prayer of Aurelia.

"Profoundly convinced of the change in my feelings, I deemed that no harm could result from an acceptance of the invitation. A stoic's slumbers were mine that night, and I awoke next morning well satisfied with myself, never suspecting that the pleasure of seeing Aurelia once more had aught to do with my good humour.

"At eight o'clock I went to Don Massimo's, where I found the whole party in readiness to start. Aurelia welcomed me with smiles, and held out her hand, which I pressed with emotion.

"The calash dashed on ahead, and I whipped up the horses of the old carriage. At Santa Flavia Don Massimo produced a card of admission to the villa of the Marquis Artale, where the *concierge* permitted us, unwatched, to wander at will through the gardens.

"Merrily the day glided by, and I felt a freedom of mind that gave me the loftiest opinion of my courage. We were to dine on our return to Palermo; but, as a concession to appetite, we had brought a lunch with us, and while discussing it Don Massimo unluckily offered me some Marsala wine from his own vineyard. I drank three-quarters of a bottle, and at once felt my reason take flight as utterly as though a magician had corked it within a phial.

"A jealous man's madness is like a tiger's; but if to it you add the intoxication of wine, you will transform yourself into a brute like Nebuchadnezzar, nor is there any extravagance or even crime whereof a corsair-like nature such as mine is not capable.

"When I beheld Aurelia approach her lover and whisper in his ear, a frenzy took possession of my brain, and I ran like a raving lunatic across the flower beds, and, opening my knife, threw it from a great distance at the trees, with that sureness of aim which never deserts a Sicilian.

"I cannot say what other signs of dementia I mani-

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fested in that terrible outburst of passion. I had lost all consciousness of where I was when I heard voices calling to me from afar. Day was declining, and the party were waiting for me in order to return to Palermo.

"What remains to be told does me little credit, but the lash of shame will perhaps serve me in lieu of penance.

"Pippino and Aurelia got into the old carriage together. The route practicable for carriages and hewn into the rock, wound down the steep hill from the Marquis Artale's residence. Don Massimo's coachman carefully held in the calash horses and descended at a moderate speed, beholding in dismay my usually pacific team dash ahead of him at a gallop.

"Thinking of the pleasure of the lovers sitting together in that antiquated affair, I felt my dizziness increase.

"A fury seemed to fly through the air with arms extended over my head, suggesting to me the infernal though of overturning the vehicle.

"Arrived at a perilous curve, well known to me, I drove so near to the edge of the road that one of the wheels was in the air. Away went the carriage, down twenty feet of embankment; I felt the wind caused by the momentum of the fall; I heard something like a thunderclap echo through my brain, and then all was a blank!

"When I regained consciousness I was listening to the trickle of a little stream. It was the blood flowing from my arm into a basin. I was at home in my bed, with a hole in my temple and a broken collarbone. The surgeon, seeing me unclose my eyes, felt relieved and assured of my recovery; but what suffering I was compelled to endure

"For three months I lay on my back, motionless as a statue on a tomb, and bound fast as if in a vice by some twenty-five yards of bandages.

"Ixion on his wheel could not have experienced greater torture.

"There is a god for the lovers, but none for the jealous.

"Pippino and Aurelia had clasped each other in their fall, and thus the catastrophe procured them the sweetness of a tender embrace; while nobody was hurt except me.

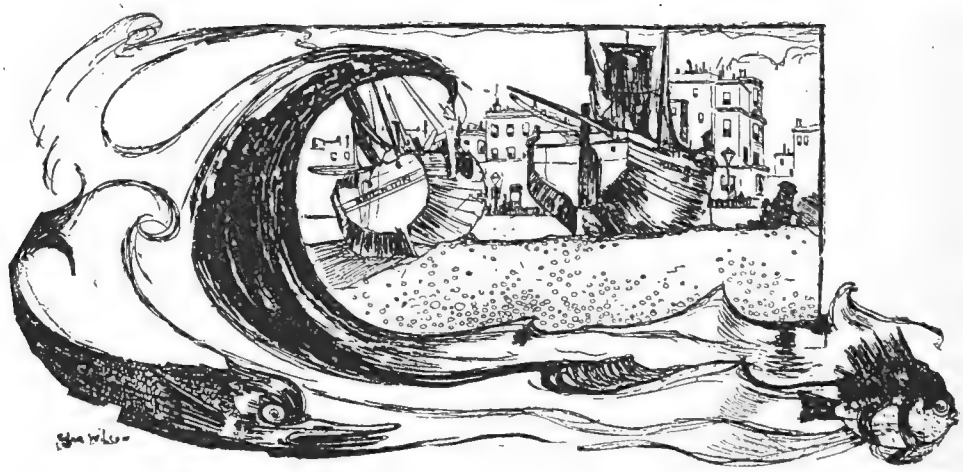
"Nothing sooner cures one of love's madness or jealousy than a cavity in one's skull and a fractured clavicle. Before I was convalescent, my friend and Aurelia were betrothed, and my first venture out of doors took me, limping, to the church of Santa Zita, in order to witness, with neither rancour or grief, the wedding of Pippino and Aurelia.

"Shortly thereafter Pippino had to practise in the law court at Messina, and took his bride along with him. Don Massimo, also, left Palermo not long afterwards, and went to live with his daughter.

"As for me, since that woeful adventure, I have endeavoured to be philosophical, and I do my best to live and amuse myself. Having discovered the danger of loving one woman, I now deem it wiser to love all womankind!"

Five years later Signor Cornelio, having hurried off to Messina to take part in the insurrection and bombardment that occurred at that time, with gun on shoulder and at the head of the detachment of troops of which he had been placed in command, was killed by the explosion of a shell; and thus the Zingara's prediction came true at last.

J. P. L.



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Football Players Competition!

OPEN TO EVERYBODY. **£10 IN PRIZES.** OPEN TO EVERYBODY.

Below will be found ten sets of words, each of which indicates the name of some well-known football player.

For example, "A young goose" signifies, of course, Gosling.

PIN ALL YOUR SHEETS TOGETHER AT THE TOP LEFT-HAND CORNER, PLACE THEM IN AN ENVELOPE MARKED "PLAYERS," AND POST TO REACH THIS OFFICE BY MONDAY, OCTOBER 10th.

To the person who succeeds in solving the greatest number we will give

A CRISP £5 NOTE.

TO THE NEXT, £2; TO THE NEXT, £2; AND TO THE NEXT, £1; while consolation prizes will be awarded to the extent of twenty handsome volumes which competitors may select for themselves from the catalogue of books issued by this firm. In the event a tie, the prize will go to the sender of the neatest set of solutions.

If you are weak in the names of football players, your brother, or cousin, or male friend will give you a helping hand.

SHORT STORIES "FOOTBALL PLAYERS" COUPON No. 5.

41.	**A room for cooking.**	41.	.....
42.	**A sore.**	42.	.....
43.	**Conceited pedal extremity.**	43.	.....
44.	**Plead.**	44.	.....
45.	**An ancient warrior.**	45.	.....
46.	**A fish.**	46.	.....
47.	**A drink.**	47.	.....
48.	**A greater quantity of ground.**	48.	.....
49.	**You.**	49.	.....
50.	**Unpaid.**	50.	.....

Name .....

Address .....

.....

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What Might Have Been.

A SKETCH FROM LIFE.

This adventure happened to me last year. I had just taken my seat in a corner of an empty compartment in the train, and had closed the door, with the hope of remaining alone, when it was suddenly reopened, and I heard a voice say:

"Be careful, sir, the step is very high."

Another voice replied: "Don't be afraid, Lawrence, I will hold tight."

Then a head appeared covered with a round hat, and two hands, grasping each side of the door, slowly hoisted a large body whose feet made a noise on the step like that of a cane striking the ground. When the man had drawn his body into the compartment, I noticed the painted ends of two wooden legs.

A head appeared behind this traveller, and I heard its owner ask:

"Are you comfortable, sir?"

"Yes, my boy."

"Then here are your bundles and your crutches."

And a servant, who had the air of an old soldier, got in, bearing in his arms a lot of packages done up in black and-yellow paper, carefully tied, and placed them one after the other in the network rack above his masters head. Then he said:

"There, sir, that is all. There are five bundles; the sweetmeats, the doll, the drum, the gun and the *patés de foie gras.*"

"That's all right, my boy."

"A pleasant journey, sir."

"Thank you, Lawrence."

The servant stepped down, closed the door and went away, while I observed my neighbour. He was perhaps thirty-five years old, although his hair was nearly white. He was decorated, wore a moustache, and had that pursy obesity of strong and vigorous men whom an infirmity obliges to remain inactive. He wiped his brow, puffed, and looking me straight in the face, said:

"Does smoking disturb you, sir?"

"Not at all," I replied.

I knew that eye, voice and face; but where and when had I seen them? I had certainly met this man, spoken to him and shaken his hand. It was long, long ago, lost in that haze where the mind seems to obscurely seek and pursue its souvenirs, like fleeting phantoms, without being able to grasp them.

My fellow traveller now began to examine me with the tenacity and fixity of a man who recollects slightly. Tired by this steady contact, our eyes turned away; then, after a few seconds, attracted by the obscure but persistent action of the memory, they again met, and I remarked:

"Really, instead of looking at each other stealthily for an hour, would it not be better to try and recall where we have met?"

"You are quite right," replied my neighbour, with good grace.

"My name is Henry Bonclair," I added.

He hesitated for a few seconds: then, with a vagueness of eye and voice which generally accompanies great tension of mind, he said:

"Ah, yes! I met you at the Poncels, before the Egyptian war, a dozen years ago."

"Exactly. Ah! Ah! you are Lieutenant Somers?"

"Yes; I was even Captain Somers until the day when I lost my feet—both of them at a single stroke from a passing shell."

We looked at each other anew, now that we were acquainted.

I remembered perfectly well having seen this man when he was a fine-looking, slender fellow, who led the *cotillons* with a nimble and graceful enthusiasm. But behind this figure there still floated something that I could not grasp—some story that I had known and forgotten—one of those stories to which one lends short attention, and which leave only an imperceptible impression on the mind. There was love in it. I recalled the peculiar sensation from the depths of my memory but nothing more.

Little by little, however, the shadows cleared away, and the face of a young girl rose before my eyes. Then her name, Miss Mandal, flashed upon my mind Now I remembered everything. It was in fact a love-story, but an ordinary one. This young girl loved this young man when I met them, and people spoke of their coming marriage.

I raised my eyes to the rack where all those bundles were trembling with the motion of the train, and the servant's voice returned to me as though he had just finished speaking. He had said:

"There sir, that is all. There are five bundles; the sweetmeats, the doll, the drum, the gun and the *patés de foie gras.*"

In a second a romance was composed and unrolled in my mind. It resembled all the romances which one so often reads, in which the young man or the young woman marries his or her choice after overcoming all obstacles. So this officer, mutilated during the war, had again found after the campaign the young girl who

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was pledged to him, and keeping her engagement, she had married him.

I considered that to be beautiful but simple, just as we judge to be simple all the heroic actions in books and at the theatre. When we read or listen at these schools of magnanimity, we always feel that we should have sacrificed ourselves with an enthusiastic pleasure and a magnificent impulse. But we are always in a bad humour on the following day when a wretched friend comes to borrow money.

Suddenly, another supposition, less poetic and more realistic, replaced the first one. Perhaps the officer had been married before the war, before this frightful accident that had cut off his feet, and his wife had been obliged, grieved and resigned, to receive, care for, console and sustain this husband who had started off strong and handsome, but now returned, after having lost his feet, a frightful wreck, condemned to inactivity, impotent anger and fatal obesity.

Was he happy, or wretched? I was seized with an irresistible desire to know his history, or at least the principal points of it, which would permit me to divine what he could not or would not tell me.

I talked with him while thinking at the same time. We had exchanged a few commonplace remarks, and as I raised my eyes to the rack, I thought to myself: "So he has three children; the sweetmeats are for his wife, the doll for his little girl, the drum and gun for his sons, and the *patés de foie gras* for himself."

Suddenly I asked him: "You are a father?"

"No," he replied.

I felt confused, as though I had committed an impropriety and continued:

"I beg your pardon. I thought you were, on hearing your servant speak of playthings. We often hear without listening, and draw conclusions, in spite of ourselves."

He smiled and murmured: "No, I am not even married. I stopped at the preliminaries."

I pretended to remember all at once. "Ah, that's true; you were engaged when I knew you—to Miss Mandal, I believe?"

"Yes, sir, your memory is excellent."

I was excessively audacious, and added: "I also have a vague idea of having heard that Miss Mandal married Mr.—Mr.——"

"Mr. Johnson," he interrupted, in a calm tone.

"Yes, that's it. I remember, even, to have heard about your wound."

I looked at him intently, and he blushed. His full, puffy face, already purple from the constant afflux of blood, became still more highly coloured. He replied with the animation and sudden ardour of a man who pleads a case lost in advance in his mind and heart, but who wishes to win it before public opinion:

"People are wrong in coupling Mrs. Johnson's name with mine. When I returned from Egypt—without my feet, a'as!—I could never have accepted her offer to become my wife. Was such a thing possible? When a woman marries it is not to make a parade of generosity; it is to live every day, every hour, every minute and every second by the side of a man; and if he is deformed, as I am, she condemns herself, in marrying him, to suffering that will last unto death. Oh, I understand and admire all the sacrifices and devotion when they have a limit; but I do not admit that a woman should renounce an existence which she hopes will prove happy, and abandon all her joys and dreams for the sake of satisfying the admiration of the gallery. Do you believe that a man can induce a woman to tolerate what he himself cannot bear? And, besides, do you think that my wooden feet are attractive?"

Captain Somers became silent. What could I say to him? I felt he was right. Could I blame her, scorn her, or even admit that she was wrong? No. However, the *dénouement*, which conformed to the rule, to the average, to truth and probability, did not satisfy my poetic appetite. These heroic stumps called for a noble sacrifice that was wanting, and I experienced a profound disappointment.

"Has Mrs. Johnson any children?" I asked him suddenly.

"Yes; a daughter and two sons. These toys are for them. She and her husband have been very kind to me."

The train shortly after entered King's Cross. I was about to offer my arm to help the mutilated officer to alight, when two hands were stretched towards him through the open door.

"Good afternoon, Captain."

"Ah! good afternoon, Johnson."

Behind the man was a woman smiling radiantly and throwing her "good afternoon" with her gloved fingers. A little girl by her side jumped with joy, and two youngsters looked with eager eyes at the drum and gun that their father was taking down from the rack.

When the disabled man was upon the platform, all the children kissed him. Then the crowd started off, the little girl holding in her hand the varnished support of the crutch, as she would have been able to hold, in walking at his side, the thumb of her big friend.

G. H. W.

If a girl knows she is pretty it is not because any other girl told her so.

Teacher: "Mary? And what is your last name?"

Young Woman: "I can't tell just yet, but the chances are that it will be Smith."

Fair Visitor: "How can you tell an optimist from a pessimist?"

The Artist: "The one says: 'That's good,' and the other: 'That's not bad'!"

Bank Teller: "This cheque, madam, isn't filled in."

Madam: "Isn't what?"

Bank Teller: "It has your husband's name signed to it, but it does not state how much money you want."

Madam: "Oh, is that all? Well, I'll take all there is."

"Papa," said Johnny, to his paternal ancestor, "did you know that some insects could be decapitated without being hurt in the least by the operation?"

Papa: "No, Johnny, I did not know anything of the kind, and you needn't spring any such yarns on me."

Johnny: "There's no yarn about it, papa. I've often seen bee-headed insects flying about"

"Is it possible, sir," said the visitor, as he looked at a specimen in the museum of the Scientific Association, "that this is a petrification?"

"Yes, sir," replied the custodian, with pardonable pride, "that is a genuine petrified ham."

"Is it for sale?" demanded the visitor excitedly. "If it is, I want it. I don't care a bit what it costs?"

(You have guessed correctly. He was the proprietor of a railway refreshment bar.)

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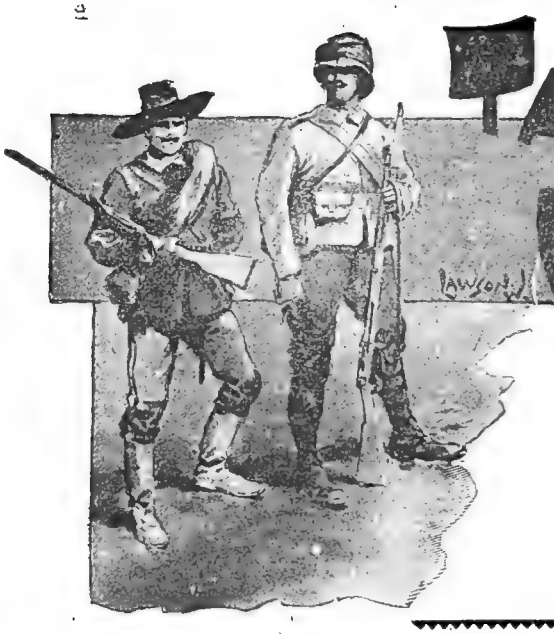

THE FINAL WAR

BY

LOUIS TRACY.

Author of "The Shadow Hand," "An American Emperor," "The Lost Provinces," etc.

SUMMARY.

TIME 1898. Irene, daughter of Lord Eskdale, Ambassador at Paris, is engaged to Captain Edward Harington, Lord Eskdale's military *attaché*, and Lieutenant Rodney, of H.M.S. *Magnificent*, to Harington's sister, Ethel.

France and Germany declare war against Great Britain.

An attempt to land at Worthing is made by a combined French and German fleet of 36 ironclads, 40 troopships, and 100 smaller boats. The local volunteers hold them in check till the regulars arrive from London.

An inventor secures an audience with the Prince of Wales and demonstrates to him the utility of a new weapon, with the result that steps are immediately taken to manufacture an enormous number of them.

The *Hornet*, a torpedo boat, commanded by Rodney, blows up the Suez Canal. Paris is in a state of fermentation owing to the repulse of the Allied fleet.

Admiral Sir Michael Culme-Seymour's fleet gains a decisive victory over the Allies off the Rock of Gibraltar.

A representative of the *New York World* interviews Lord Salisbury on a matter that is not yet made public.

The British organise two expeditions, one to invade France, and one to invade Germany. The first army corps appears off Havre, and after a short bombardment which lasts till nightfall, the fleet withdraws, the troopships move northwards, and the soldiers are landed at a point opposite Bléville.

The French are routed and the British enter the city.

On receiving news of Lord Roberts' successes in France, Sir Evelyn Wood sets sail with his expedition for Germany. A small but powerful fleet under Sir Nowell Salmon engages the attention of the enemy at the mouth of the Kiel Canal. Meanwhile, the main body of troops arrive with a large escort in sight of Stralsund. A brigade of cavalry under Colonel Lockhart attacks and captures the town from the rear. The next morning 200,000 Englishmen lay encamped on German soil.

The United States meanwhile remains neutral, but contemplates the ultimate annexation of Canada. The merchants of New York purchase £40,000,000 worth of the newly-created stock. Admiral Mahan commands the United States Fleet to maintain the security of her merchantmen.

The British win the battle of Les Rois d'Yvetot; the allies fall back on Russian aid, and their leaders set out by special train to interview the Tsar.

CHAPTER XIX. (*continued*).

CAPRIVI was silent for a moment or two and then remarked with emphasis:

"You are right in the main. We should have crushed England at once. We forgot that every Englishman is a soldier by instinct and by inheritance. Give Britain a moment to breathe in and the earth swarms with her armies, the seas teem with her fleets."

"Still, there is a limit," interposed Dumpf sagaciously.

"A limit!" laughed Hanotaux. "Annihilate one army and there are two in its place."

"True!" quietly put in Caprivi. "You will remember that it was the raw levies of Surrey that won the day at Waterloo!"

The two Frenchmen turned pale with anger at the remark, and the German General interposed quickly:

"Let there be no quarrelling," he said. "We are friends and allies now, and the task before us is not an easy one. We must, for our own credit, do everything to prevent the necessity of calling out the Reserves. That would be an ignominy not to be endured. Russia has given her word; she will now give her armies. It may cost us something; but there is no looking back. England must be crushed now, or for ever dominate the earth."

The four ambassadors were treated with grave ceremony at Petersburg. The phlegmatic Russians, never eager to welcome a defeated ally, regarded them with a coldness which the French statesmen observed with much misgiving. There were no rapturous crowds to acclaim them, only a few casual bystanders gathered on the corners of the streets to gaze curiously into the carriage. The Russian capital was indifference itself.

The audience given at the Royal Palace was one of the strangest in history. Three of the most powerful nations in the world were meeting in conference, and their one object was the destruction of the great people who had taught each the art of government.

They met in the Tsar's private study. It was an impressive spectacle.

The young Tsar, filled with a sense of the divine right of monarchy, possessed of the madness of autocracy which blindly believed in the inspiration of its mission, received the French and German legatees with a chill, imperial dignity.

On his right sat General Gourko, the only statesman admitted into the imperial confidence. The Tsar's impetuous, often arrogant temper was balanced by the shrewd, calculating genius of a diplomat who had no illusions, and weighed his men as the analyst weighs the ingredients of a poison.

With infinite skill and sagacity M. Hanotaux unfolded the designs of the united powers and sought to show the necessity for Russia's intervention.

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"We have the enemy in our grasp," he argued. "There are two British armies landed upon the Continent. One of them is hemmed in a few hundred miles from Paris. The other is hopelessly inclosed in the defences of Stralsund. We are millions to their thousands. Our victory is a matter of days. But——"

"But you come to Petersburg!" drily interposed Gourko.

"We come, it is true, but why? Your Majesty, the position is simple. We can defeat the enemy. But that is not enough. If England is to be crushed, she must be crushed at once, and not only on our shores, but on her own. Every day makes shorter the distance that separates her from her colonies. These Saxons have the brute instinct of the family. Give them a month and we shall have the Canadian, the African, the Australian, and the Indian fighting side by side in Europe. If it were only needed to beat England, it is done. What can half a million avail against seven millions? But much more is needed. England must be overwhelmed, invaded, blotted out, and that at once. We must be in London in a fortnight. Otherwise we shall not be fighting a country but a whole hemisphere!"

The Tsar turned full on the speaker.

"Are your millions not enough for this?" he asked.

"What?" exclaimed the Tsar.

"Your Majesty," answered Count Caprivi, "it is, you are aware, dangerous at all times to call up the whole fighting strength of a nation; but under such conditions, after—well let me frankly say it, after failure which should have been success, it might be disastrous. A nation roused to action is a terrible force that may strike we know not where!"

"Your meaning is clear," said the Tsar with a certain proud scorn. "Your democracy, it appears, knows how to dance and play, but it clearly is still a child. You, M. Hanotaux, are afraid of this great infant you have called to life. He plays in his nursery now with rattles and nine-pins; but at times it is crowns and portfolios and even heads that he plays with. And you, Count, are afraid to arm your loyal burghers for fear that gunpowder will teach them the secret of freedom."

"No, sire," replied Caprivi with dignity. "We are prepared to do our part as Heaven may will. But is it fair that the burden should fall upon two nations who have no less to gain than you? Russia will not decline the responsibility which her profit demands from her."

"What?" exclaimed the Tsar, suddenly rising, and hot with passion. "Do you deem that Russia stands in aid of Europe to secure whatever her heart is set on? What are France and Germany to the splendid empire which is mine, an empire unmeasurable and irresistible, filling the two continents with its acres, sending forth its tendrils to every country, and slowly and silently absorbing the earth? France plays with her toy constitutions, sets up her sham ministries day after day, calls herself republic or monarchy as the whim seizes her, aye, and sends ridiculous trinkets to Sandy Hook, monuments of Europe's folly to America's madness. And Germany? She whines and pules for land like a fretful invalid, with a ruler who pipes and paints and chatters and stalks, as if kingship were a huckstering, a mere jack-of-all-trades. Russia is the sole, the great representative of the one lasting idea that the world can never forget—the idea of imperial sway, of autocracy, of divine rulership. She stands aside and apart from all nations. She needs them not. Some day they shall become part of her. The hour of the Slav is upon you; you feel it even now and stand abashed. Talk not to me of Russia's fear of Britain or of the world itself."

Gourko, who had listened gravely and with respect, here quickly interposed.

"Russia has no need of alliances," he said. "But if you ask for help, she is not therefore deaf."

"General," exclaimed de Visne, "you will remember that you are committed. Your hand is set to the league of Europe."

"In part," replied the General. "We are inactive. If we interpose and rescue you from your unfortunate position what compensation do you propose?"

"Compensation!" cried Caprivi. "You have already India!"

"We have India as fee for inactivity."

"But it is the biggest prize of all!"

"And well earned, surely. Had we moved there might have been no need of a storming of Stralsund. If we are to send our armies and our ships we shall need some other price."

"And that is——"

"Gentlemen," said Gourko impressively, "we claim Turkey and Asia Minor."

The four delegates looked at one another in hopeless astonishment. Russia, grasping in all she did, had outwitted them. Already the brunt of the war and all its horrors had fallen upon France and Germany. And now Russia demanded the two most coveted territories that earth still held out to tempt a nation's vanity.

There was a hurried consultation. The Tsar and Gourko sat apart, cold, impassive, inflexible. The game was theirs. They knew too well the pitiful dilemma of the suppliants to their favour. When M. Hanotaux sullenly announced acquiescence in the monstrous terms proposed, barely a smile broke the rigid calmness of Gourko's impenetrable face.

"And what would you have us do?" he asked.

Count Caprivi urged the necessity of breaking up the English navy.

"Destroy the fleet at Stralsund," he said, "and we shall have crippled her strongest arm and caught the English army in a snare. Both Stralsund and Havre demand relief. Break through the blockade, sink the enemies' ships' and we are free to decimate the land forces and make unopposed for British territory."

M. Hanotaux agreed with this advice.

Gourko whispered in his Sovereign's ear. The Tsar nodded assent and the General observed:

"That may be well as a matter for your own relief. But we have a larger duty before us. We must cripple England. What avail the fleets at Stralsund and Havre? They are impotent to do further harm. You can cut to pieces without difficulty the rash, adventurous men who have landed on your shores."

"Pardon me," interposed Hanotaux, "the destruction of the English navy is the first consideration. Leave *that* alone and no matter what is done we have not yet begun."

"His Majesty thinks otherwise," coldly replied Gourko. "He is of opinion that our best course is to invade England now that she is unguarded and destitute of her men. Let us seize the island and the fleet can be decimated by degrees. You will never advance a step in the war till you have set foot upon British soil."

The envoys were not of his opinion; but after some deliberation the crafty Gourko had wrung from them an admission that his plan was the wiser.

For an hour the General and the envoys deliberated over the details of this new and terrible movement in the war, and then, with gracious condescension, the Tsar dismissed his visitors.

When they had left the apartment, General Gourko smiled grimly.

"And these are their statesmen!" he exclaimed.

"General," was the Tsar's reply, "Heaven fights for Holy Russia. Her future expands, resistless. This war is but as an instrument for her omnipotence."

"The way is clear," said Gourko. "With your permission,

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sire, I will see that a message of sympathy is telegraphed to London. It is essential that there should be no suspicion of the part we shall so soon be playing."

The Tsar turned upon his general a scornful glance.

The envoys drove back to their hotel.

"General Gourko," he said imperiously. "We are not hucksters. Russia has no need of lies. It is humiliating enough if she needs to keep back the truth; to speak the lie is unworthy of her ruler and of one whom her ruler trusts."

Gourko smiled at this rebuke, retired, and sent the telegram.

The envoys drove back to their hotel half mollified, half jubilant. Caprivi, more than his companions, was moody and silent.

As the carriage was turning into the courtyard, an oath suddenly escaped him, and the others, looking upon him, saw his face dark with rage.

"Dupes!" he cried. "Dupes! Fools that we are. I see it plainly enough!"

"What do you mean?" cried Hanotaux.

"What do I mean? Do you not see? We asked the Tsar to destroy the English fleet. Any fool can see it is our one hope of safety. And instead he insists upon slipping by and landing on English soil."

"Well?"

"Is it so inscrutable, this perfidious purpose? They can do nothing if they land; England's citizens are still there. Can a few ships hope to master an Imperial island? No: they know full well that the move is only a blind."

"For what?" demanded de Visne.

"Gourko wants to alarm England by threatening her shores. He hopes thereby to force her to send for her Indian army. That arm of hers, the strongest military arm in the world, once on the high seas, and Russia can march across the boundary and take possession of India!"

"And we——?"

"Bah! We, indeed! Russia does not care a rap for us. She leaves us to invasion, to sieges, to blockade, to all the burden of the war. She is simply looking out for herself. She will seize her own booty and leave us to pay the bill!"

CHAPTER XX.

The German Emperor.

Sir Evelyn Wood had successfully accomplished the difficult task committed to him.

A powerful English army had landed at Stralsund, and now occupied one of the strongest positions upon the sea-coast of Germany.

It was true the English General had only 200,000 men, against whom were ranged the entire military forces of Germany. Although for the present the huge army of the "Fatherland" was variously engaged, part of it being occupied in northern France and part still waiting with impatience upon the shores of the Mediterranean at Marseilles till their imprisoned transports might be able to get past the steel fence at Gibraltar and carry them to the agreeable task of dealing a blow at Great Britain herself, there was yet available for immediate purposes a large and well-trained force, which, in point of numbers, seemed likely to overwhelm the brave captors of Stralsund.

Before twelve hours had elapsed nearly 400,000 men, gathered from the Capital, from Dantzic, from the Kiel Canal, and from the various military depots of the North, had made their way by rail to Grimmen, a town not twenty-five miles distant from Stralsund, and there prepared to crush the adventurous foe either by a decisive onslaught or by the painful agony of a determined siege.

One enormous advantage Sir Evelyn Wood possessed. The position he occupied was such as a general might have prayed for.

Behind him lay the marsh-bound city with its invulnerable sea walls. In the land-locked channel beyond rode the splendid fleet that had so superbly silenced the guns of Rugen.

Three lines of railway ran out from his base. That to his right ran beneath the Schleswig-Holstein Peninsula towards Lübeck and Hamburg; that to his left to Stettin; whilst due south a third made direct to the German capital.

Stationed at the convergence of these three railways, it was clear that the General could throw out his army in large and distinct masses for a considerable distance, and yet keep in rapid commnication with every section.

Whilst Sir Evelyn was inspecting the outlying district in the direct front, having for its centre the line to Berlin, he pointed out to those members of his staff nearest to him the natural advantages of his position.

"Whatever the odds against us," he observed, "we should be invulnerable."

"So long as we stay here, sir," assented one of his officers.

"Do not look forward to an excursion into Germany yet awhile," responded the General with a grim smile. "Our duty is clear. We must cling to Stralsund with desperation. With 200,000 men not even Napoleon, with Wellington as chief of the staff, could march into a hostile country teeming with gigantic armies. No; we cannot afford to indulge in the mere vain glory of fanatical heroism. Our men have need of self-restraint as well as courage here."

"Then you intend to keep at Stralsund?"

"Yes. In two days or less we shall be surrounded by an immense army, through which it will be impossible to cut our way. But luckily we have a strong position. I will establish my lines on those low hills, which are, I should calculate, about four miles away. With this spacious plain as my base, with three miles of railways, with a strong fortress at my back, it will not be difficult to remain here as long as our stores last."

"And thus keep the Germans engaged?"

"Exactly," responded the General. "It is our part to hold stoutly to Stralsund and keep at us one or more of the German Army Corps. We shall thus prevent a massing of the two nations in France, and Lord Robert's task will be so much the lighter. Don't be afraid that there will be no fighting. We shall have to be troublesome, but we must not hazard a fixed engagement. We must wait in patience till we can go forward."

The officer looked at his general in surprise.

"Wait?" he asked. "For what?"

"Wait," was the laconic reply, "till Canada and South Africa and Australia come swimming down the Baltic."

And with these words he turned his horse's head and rode back to his quarters. Within a very few hours the first rough entrenchment of the English army was perfected. Soldier and sailor, working side by side, with cheerful song and unfailing jest, accomplished miracles. Stralsund was once more herself, and her guns gleamed more cruelly than ever over the blue water.

Four miles distant from the outskirts of the town ran a low ridge of hills. Through deep cuttings the three railways burrowed their way east, south, and west, opening a passage to all Germany. Where these cuttings lay, Sir Evelyn Wood took up his main positions, throwing up earthworks which hourly became more formidable, and whence the British guns swept for miles the whole of the shelterless plain that spread to the south. In the delta formed by this line of forts and the town of Stralsund the

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army lay encamped, sheltered by the sloping hills no less than by the guns.

Of ammunition and supplies there was abundance. Hour after hour the ships gave up their wealth of stores, and it was quite clear that Sir Evelyn would be able, with ease, to maintain himself and his army in position for at least a month or six weeks.

It was not long before the strength of his defence was afforded an opportunity for proof.

On the day after the landing of the British, the German Army Corps assembled at Grimmen, was already overwhelming in its strength, and a determined effort was made by the Germans to drive home a reconnaissance in force.

At first the General in command thought to pierce through the British lines by the mere vehemence of his assault. A desperate attack was made upon their position, but the plan was folly itself. The English guns swept down the advancing foe with fearful precision, and the plain lay littered with the dead before the assailants could deal a single effective blow.

Twice was this wild course followed, with only repeated havoc and butchery. It became clear to the German General that it was a case of investment and not of isolated attack.

He next sought to tempt the English to a sortie, and on one occasion, after a bitter and apparently well-meant assault along the whole line of front open to him, he withdrew his right wing so rapidly as to give the idea of a precipitate flight.

Sir Evelyn Wood smiled.

"We will give them all they will care for in the way of attack," he observed, "but we will choose our own time and method."

Thus for three days the British lay at Stralsund, secure yet unable to move, whilst intermittent fighting and occasional assault filled up the burden of the hours.

Throwing up earthworks.

It was then that the German Emperor realised that he himself was needed. The sacred Fatherland was soiled by the print of a hostile foot, and yet no visible earthquake had occurred. Only the print became larger and larger, and its toe threatened to stretch to his own Palace under the lindens.

He had good cause to be mortified. No sooner had the false intelligence of the landing of the invaders on the English coast reached him, than with impetuous enthusiasm he sent the following telegram:

To General Von Bremen, Worthing. Your success is only what your Emperor expected. You shall name your reward when you enter London.

Next day the telegram was returned to him, as the continental cables had not been destroyed. The postmaster at Worthing was not without his sense of humour. His endorsement was:

Returned, address not known, neither of him or any other German general. Try English Channel.

This was not pleasant, but the German Emperor was not to be easily dispirited. He felt that the hour had come when he should prove himself the saviour of his country, and he laid aside with reluctance the composition of an epic and the music of a comic opera on which he was engaged.

He was closeted with Herr Pimpelnick, a poet of some renown, when the news of the capture of Stralsund arrived.

The poet handed him a few verses, which the Emperor had given him to correct. They flamed with patriotism.

William looked at the paper with some perplexity.

"It does not seem quite the same," he declared.

"Your Majesty," replied Pimpelnick. "I have merely ventured to alter one or two expressions."

"But the rhymes?"

"Yes, sire; I made a few changes in the metre, and gave just a touch or two to the scansion. One or two lines you will see I have left out, and I have added——"

"Impertinent!" exclaimed the Emperor. "Have you dared to tamper with your sovereign's poetry?"

"Pardon, sire," stammered the trembling Pimpelnick; "but by the laws of prosody——"

"Laws of prosody!" fiercely interrupted the Emperor, "Do you think that the Emperor William is bound by laws as other men? I make laws, not follow them."

He might have done many unpleasant things to the poor poet had not his Chamberlain created a diversion by bringing the disastrous news of Stralsund.

William was courageous enough, but his sense of proportion was distinctly weak.

His first act was to order 4,500,000 copies of his last patriotic song to be printed and distributed to his soldiers.

He also ordered that it should be sung with regularity each day. And sung it might have been, only that no tune could be found or devised to fit the eccentric vagaries of the words.

Next he issued a proclamation to his people in magniloquent language, in which the whole pomp and sublimity of the Teutonic tongue displayed itself.

"My people," it began, "your Emperor at last calls upon your patriotism. Your devotion to him and your respect for the God of your religion alike bid you go forth to battle for your native land. It will be some consolation to you to feel that you are not only fighting for your country, for your household hearths, for your children, and for yourselves, but that you are also fighting for your Emperor. He will be watchful and untiring, and his presence shall cheer and his wisdom direct his subjects in their holy quarrel.

"England has dared to invade our Fatherland. She alone is responsible for the terrible crime of a murderous war.

"She has incited the nations to revolt by her selfishness and the cold heartlessness of her pusillanimous prosperity. Every colony she has planted in the savage world has been a blow at peace.

"And now she throws off the mask. She resents the punishment the nations would inflict upon her for her insolence, and dares to set foot upon our beloved soil.

"But she has reckoned without the German Emperor and the German people. Let us go forth to eject the impious foe.

"Your Emperor's voice calls upon you. The supreme hour of Germany's great destiny has come."

This proclamation was read with much interest by the good people of Germany.

The general feeling was to laugh at the English army corps which had managed to slip into Stralsund. It was caught neatly in a trap. But a few days were needed, and the foe could be outnumbered ten to one.

And yet there was not lacking an undercurrent of revolt. The liberal spirit, so often crushed and maimed by the new Imperialism, looked with fear and loathing on this unholy conspiracy against the one nation which stood before the world as a champion of freedom. There came, too, the conviction that another triumph of militarism would be the last fatal blow to the hopes of German liberty. Let the united powers trample upon Great Britain and Imperialism would become a despotism, unveiled and unassailable.

Beneath the loyal shout that rang through the columns of a handcuffed Press there was, therefore, an ominous muttering.

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For four days the English guns had snarled down from the slopes round Stralsund on the German army, and twice had a definite onset of the enemy been turned to rout and confusion, when the Emperor reached the seat of war.

William looked at the paper with some perplexity.

He immediately sent for General Von Bremen, who was in command—a Von Bremen of a somewhat more chastened spirit and a milder demeanour since his return in a battered ship from the fight at Worthing—and informed him that the direction of affairs would in future be his—William's.

"I will inspect the position at once," he said. "On my return I will meet the General officers. See that they are assembled in two hours' time."

"At headquarters, sire?" asked the General.

"No. I observed a school house on my way here. Let them assemble there."

So saying he rode away.

The prospect was not encouraging. The English lines lay round Stralsund in the form of a huge semi-circle. On either side the morass pushed out its deadly slime. A chain of batteries which swept the whole field of action presented an inseparable barrier.

The German army was arranged in three divisions. Each was over 100,000 strong, and was possessed of ample artillery. But the position they occupied was most unfortunate. The low ground that spread its monotonous plain towards New Brandenburg afforded no point of vantage for a blockade. William saw that following the tactics of a siege they might remain there for ever, so long as the English fleet held the Baltic and threw supplies into the town of Stralsund.

He rode thoughtfully back, without a word to his escort, and reaching the school-room dismounted and entered.

There was something ludicrous in the spectacle that greeted his eye—had he but realised it. On forms and benches where little Deutscher boys were wont to grapple with the intricacies of the German language, sat old and grizzled veterans, officers who had spent a stormy apprenticeship in the great war of 1871, generals of experience and long-proved skill.

But the Emperor was not a man of humour. He did not even blush when he stood in front of the little group and said abruptly:

"Generals, I have had you assembled here that you might learn my conclusions upon the problem that is set before you. I propose to give you a brief lecture upon the science of attack. I shall be glad if you will make notes of the more important points I shall raise."

So saying, he picked up a piece of chalk and began to draw—somewhat rudely—upon the blackboard a representation of the disposition of the forces.

The generals listened respectfully. The Emperor waxed warm. It was a peculiarity of his discourse that "what was true was not new, and what was new was not true." He elaborated his scheme. His generals, it is true, had learnt it from the French Campaign, they had learnt it from Napoleon the Great, they had even seen it discussed in books, pamphlets, and in the Berlin War Gazette. But they said nothing of this.

They only looked impressed, astonished, convinced.

"Thus you will see, Generals," the Emperor was continuing, "that the most certain line of attack is to hurl your strength full upon the enemy's centre. You will lose many men, the loss may be disastrous. But you will find that the tactic is certain of success in the end. Divide the foe into two parts without inter-communication, decimate his centre, and——"

At this moment he was interrupted by the arrival of a messenger, breathless and excited.

The Emperor turned angrily upon him.

"Your Majesty," exclaimed the new-comer, "the enemy have made a sortie. They have advanced upon us and are now in full attack."

"Where are they attacking?" the Emperor eagerly asked.

"They are attacking our centre, Sire!" was the response, and the dead silence of the group as it was gazing upon the hieroglyphics on the blackboard changed to sudden excitement.

The lecture was not brought to a close in the schoolroom. There was, instead, a complete and more convincing demonstration outside!

CHAPTER XXI.

The German Emperor Gets a Lesson.

The day had dawned cold and grey, and a faint mist, heavy with the fetid air of the surrounding marshes, enveloped the plain of Stralsund.

Both armies lay concealed in its treacherous embrace, and the English outposts, doubly alert, sought anxiously to catch the ominous sounds which might betoken the enemy's advance. But the guns on either side were silent, and there prevailed that horrible stillness which, pregnant with catastrophe and destruction, broods over a brief pause in the stress of battle.

Admiral Fitzroy and Sir Evelyn Wood had spent the forenoon in close discussion of the situation.

"I fear," said the General gravely, "that I ought not to accept your proposal that the fleet should remain in the harbour of Stralsund. It is, of course, for you to decide, but you will doubtless be of much more assistance to the English forces elsewhere."

"Candidly," replied the Admiral, "I do not care to leave you here. Our situation generally is, I know, full of the most terrible difficulties, and we have to violate almost every law of military science. But still, the fleet gone, you are alone, penned in an awkward country by an army that is practically inexhaustible. What can you do? How can you hope to break through? With us behind you, there is a certain path of escape; but if we go, you are not only menaced by decimation in front, you have also the danger of a hostile fleet entering the roads and turning its guns upon you."

Sir Evelyn shook his head:

"My own duty, Fitzroy, is, it seems to me, clear. I hope you will see it from the same point of view. There is not, and cannot be, escape for my army."

"No escape?"

"No. We must either hold our ground or be destroyed. It is not a case where we can talk of retreat. If we hold out we gain time. We may do considerable havoc. We at least keep a huge army corps from mischief elsewhere. But how can we retreat? Retreat can only mean that we throw up the game: it means England invaded. Do not forget that we have got to a desperate issue. We cannot indulge now in the luxury of territorial manœuvres. The fate of England must be settled here and now. If we are to be crushed, let it be on German soil. We will at least die fighting. But we must, whatever happens, remain. I shall cling to Stralsund till my last man is shot. There is nothing else to be done."

"If you are determined," replied the Admiral reluctantly, "I will say no more. It is a terrible case where a sailor has

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to turn calmly out to sea whilst the soldier is fighting for his life. I don't like it, and it goes against the grain."

"Fitzroy," said the General earnestly, "this war will see many changes, and God knows what the end will be. But we will at least not think of ourselves, only of old England. You do not know how she may need you. You cannot tell what new enemies will spring up to attack her. You cannot know what peril she may be in now. Let us part, old fellow. You know I shall do my best here. I'm not going to throw up the game without making the enemy pay more dearly for it than they care. We can only die for the old land, anyhow. And here I shall stay with all the pluck and pride of England to help me. If we win, we shall meet again. If not—well, I don't know that you or I or any one here—no, not the least amongst my men, will care a jot to keep on living. You know what I mean, Fitzroy. It is a true case of death or glory."

The Admiral pressed the General's hand.

"After all, you are right," he said. "I guess there's a task like yours for me somewhere, and I hope so. It will be some consolation to be in the thick of it."

A faint smile passed over the grave face of Sir Evelyn.

"We won't talk too much of dying," he said. "My army here is a pretty tough problem for the enemy, after all. Don't be astonished if the day of miracles returns. Two hundred thousand Englishmen! My dear Fitzroy, there's victory in the very phrase!"

And the two men, passing swiftly into matters of detail, concluded their arrangements. Two days later Admiral Fitzroy was to steam out to sea and make for the English Channel. A cruiser alone would remain in the harbour for purposes of communication.

And General Wood, with the sea at his back and countless foes in front, alone in a hostile country, cut off on all sides from deliverance, was to make his stand—a long, stubborn, desperate stand, and defy the united armies of the German Empire.

When the Admiral left him the General gave a few brief orders to his staff, and then entered the train—consisting of the engine and a single carriage—which stood on the Berlin railway, and was kept in readiness night and day for rapid journeys to the advance lines.

There was a curious expression upon his face, one that betokened both anxiety and elation.

The fact was that he had resolved upon an audacious move which the enemy least expected. Sir Evelyn Wood knew his Livy, and had not studied the strategic subtleties of Fabius in vain.

He realised that the strongest defence he could make was one judiciously blended with attack. He could not hope to put to rout the enormous army before him, but he could at least attempt to undermine its moral strength.

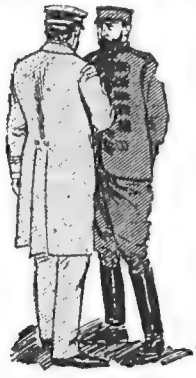
To give repeated blows to the enemy, to rush out when opportunity favoured, and sting them where they showed weakness, and always to retire as soon as he had made them smart, giving them no opportunity for leisure battle, was a policy which he knew would do more to make his position secure than the most desperate resistance upon his own lines. It was his intention to break down the confidence of the foe, to create a sense of uneasiness, and to goad them into rash retaliation. Sir Evelyn Wood was a master of tactics, and knew the galling power of swift, destructive sorties followed by brilliant retreats.

During the morning many picked regiments had been drafted from the three wings of the British Army into a magnificent division, which now rested on the seaward slopes of the centre of the line of fortifications. They formed a Reconnaissance Corps which, for experience pluck, and discipline, could undoubtedly not be equalled outside the English ranks.

Conspicuous amongst these favoured troops were the 2nd Life Guards, commanded by the Earl of Dundonald, the 1st Dragoons, under Lieutenant-Colonel Tomkinson, the Seaforth Highlanders, the Royal Irish Regiment, and the 2nd Battalion of the Buffs. The Reconnaissance Corps, was commanded by that brilliant officer, Lieutenant-General Keith Fraser, who had relinquished his position as Inspector-General of Cavalry for service in the field.

Cavalry and infantry were supported by six batteries of Horse gunners. Thoroughly equipped in every department, the corps was eminently suited to the dangerous task before it. A smart attack, swift manœuvring, a rapid and effective blow, and a hurried and orderly retreat—this programme was one which troops, trained to the last degree of perfection, and to whom concerted action had become an instinct, were likely to carry out with the utmost success.

With hearts beating high, and envied by every other soldier in the army, the Reconnaissance Corps moved down the outer slope through the faint mist and made rapidly over the plain. This human projectile, hurled when least expected, was falling upon the centre of the German army at the very moment when the young Emperor was lecturing his generals upon the art of attack and upon the specific virtue of the Napoleonic method.



The Admiral pressed the General's hand.

In all, there were not less than 3,000 sabres, and 18,000 infantry, a body large enough for inflicting a severe blow, and yet not too unwieldly for the purposes of rapid movement and a speedy retreat.

Barely had the alarm been raised, and the unsuspecting army apprised of this new danger, than a severe fire from all arms of the British forces poured into the German centre and with a dash the corps was upon them.

A slight disorder appeared in the enemy's ranks. It had not occurred to the commander to anticipate an attack. He regarded the Englishmen as so much quarry, held fast in a difficult position, waiting—it might be for a day or two—to be quietly annihilated.

Before therefore the enemy had time to reply, or to put themselves in a position to receive the onset of the English soldiers, a destructive fire had committed enormous damage, and Teuton complacency had a first and severe experience of the quality of the Saxon mettle.

In a few moments, however, the Germans had recovered themselves, and prepared to give a terrible response to the attentions of the gallant English corps. A heavy fire was opened from the batteries; but owing to the mist which still prevailed, and to the extended character of the English lines, the damage done was little, and much wild firing resulted in a waste of ammunition rather than in any effective injury.

General Fraser handled his men with consummate skill. A rapid change of front confused the German gunners, who had to guess as far as possible the position of the attacking forces.

With all the ingenuity of scientific calculation, the British Commander directed his fire upon the huge target that lay at his mercy and never halted a moment to await the reply which might be made.

In a brief time the English infantry came into close conflict with the advanced troops of the enemy. There was a shout of triumph as, with merciless aim and unwavering force, the Seaforth threw themselves upon the startled 2nd Berlin regiment, and, after a brief moment of indecision, hurled it back upon the main body.

It was at this instant that the Emperor William arrived at the front, enraged at the suddenness of the blow which had caught him napping, and excited beyond measure by the fierceness of the onslaught.

(To be continued.)

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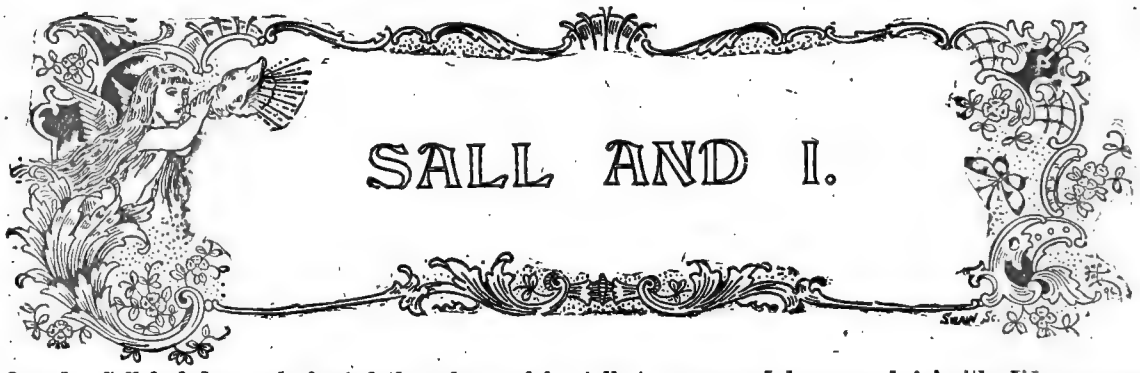

SALL AND I.

One day Sall fooled me; she heated the poker awful hot, then asked me to stir the fire. I seized hold of it mighty quick to oblige her, and dropped it quicker to oblige myself.

Well, after the poker scrape, me and Sall only got on middlin' well for some time, till I made up my mind to pop the question, for I loved her harder every day, and I had an idea she loved me, or had a sneaking kindness for me. But how to do the thing up nice and proper that perplexed me orful.

I bought some love books, and read how the fellers git down on their knees and talk like poets, and how the girls would gently fall in love with them. But somehow or other, that way didn't exactly suit my idea. I asked mother how she and dad courted, but she said it had been so long she had forgotten all about it. Uncle Joe said mother did all the courting.

At last I made up my mind to go ahead and chance it, for this thing was fairly consumin' my mind; so I goes over to her dad's, and when I got there I sat like a stupid, thinkin' how to begin.

Sall seed something was troubling me, so she said, says she:

"Are you ill, Peter?"

She said this very soft-like.

"Yes! No!" sez I. "That is, I ain't quite well. I thought I'd come over to-night," sez I.

I thought that was a good beginnin'; so I tried agin.

"Sall," sez I, and by this time I felt a bit nervous and a little shaky about the knees, "Sall," sez I.

"What?" sez she.

"Sall," sez I agin.

"What?" sez she.

"I'll get to it after a while at this rate," thinks I.

"Peter," sez she, "there's suthin' troublin' you; it's very wrong for you to keep it from a body, for an inward sorrer is a consumin' fire."

She said this, she did, the sly minx. She knowed what was the matter all the time very well, and was only tryin' to fish it out; but I was so far gone I couldn't see the point. At last I gulped down the big lump risin' in my throat, and I sez, sez I:

"Sall, do you love anybody?"

"Well," sez she, "there's dad and mother," and a countin' of her fingers all the time, with her eyes half shut like a feller shootin' off a gun, "and there's old Fido (that were their old dog) and I can't think of anybody else just now," sez she.

Now this was orful for a feller ded in love; so, after a time, I tried another way. Sez I:

"Sall," sez I, "I'm orful lonely at home, and sometimes think if I only had a nice, pretty wife to luv and talk to, move, and have my bein' with, I'd be a very happy feller."

No notice.

"Sall, do you know any gal as would care for me?"

With that she begins, and names over all the gals for five miles round, and never once came nigh naming of herself, and sed I oughter git one of them. This got my back up, so I hitched my chair up close to her, and shut my eyes and sed:

"Sall, you are the very gal I've been hankering after for a long time. I luv you from the sole of your head to the crown of your foot, and I don't care who nos it, and if you say so, we'll be jined together in the holy bonds of hemlock!" sez I; and then I felt as if I'd throwed a ton weight off my back, I felt so relieved.

With that she gave a little scream, and then she, sed sez she:

"Peter!"

"What, Sally?" sez I.

"Yes!" sez she, a hidin' of her face behind her hands.

You can guess how I felt.

"Hooray!" sez I. "I must holler, Sall, or I shall bust. Hooray! hooray! May I jump over the table?"

With that I sat down by her and clinched the bargain with a kiss.

Talk about your blackberry jam! Talk about your strawberries and cream! You wouldn't a got me nigh 'em—they would all a'been sour after that! Oh, these gals! how good and bad, how high and low they make a feller feel! If Sall's dad hadn't sung out 'twas time all honest folks was a-bed, I'd a sat there two hours longer!

You ought to 'a' seed me when I got home! I pulled dad out of bed and hugged him. I hugged mother, I hugged Aunt Jane, I larfed and hollered, I crowed like a rooster, I danced round there, and I cut up more capers than you ever heerd tell on, till dad thought I was crazy, and got a rope to tie me with.

"Dad," sez I, "I am goin' to be married!"

"Married!" bawled dad.

"Married!" squalled mother.

"Married!" screamed Aunt Jane.

"Yes, married," sez I; "married all over, married for sure, married like a flash, joined in wedlock, spliced for worser or better, for life and for death—to Sall. I am! Me! Peter Samson, Esquire!"

With that I ups and tells 'em all about it, from A to Z. They was all extra well pleased, and I went to bed as proud as a young rooster with his first spurs.

G. Bennett.

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RAPID METHOD
OF BANISHING
SUPERABUNDANT FAT.

Extraordinary Success in the Treatment of Obesity.

INCREASING POPULARITY OF AN EFFECTUAL CURE.

"DELIGHTFUL" TREATMENT FOR CURING CORPULENCE.

The process of curing any physical disorder is so generally the converse of "delightful" that the use of this and similar terms in reference to Mr. F. C. Russell's now popular treatment for corpulency naturally attracts special attention. These terms are to be found in a large number of letters included in the just issued 18th edition of Mr. Russell's little volume of 256 pages, "Corpulency, and the Cure" (Woburn House, Store Street, Bedford Square, London, W.C.) These communications are from persons of both sexes, and it is apparent that their number is represented by thousands annually, who have found in this system of treatment a safe, rapid, and permanent cure for excessive fatness. This testimony forms in the aggregate, indeed, a wonderful record of the rapid reduction of excessive adipose tissue, and those who have personal reasons for being interested in the subject should send to the above address three penny stamps for a copy (post-free) of Mr. Russell's notably suggestive book. "I think the treatment most delightful," writes one out of a large number of equally enthusiastic correspondents. And the expressions "Admirable tonic," "Splendid stuff," "A delicious beverage mixed with mineral waters," are of constant recurrence in this singularly interesting correspondence. The details given by many of the writers of these letters as to the results of the treatment fully justify the use of such eulogistic phrases. It must certainly be delightful to experience the sensation of losing unnecessary and dangerous fat by pounds per week, and frequently by stones per month, and that by the aid of treatment which simultaneously increases the appetite and renders its reasonable indulgence innocuous. The experience, too, must be rendered still more delightful by the knowledge, which may be gained from a perusal of Mr. Russell's book, that his preparation is a pure vegetable product, without any admixture of the mineral poisons which are too frequently administered. With a candour which also is delightful, Mr. Russell prints in his book the recipe for the preparation.

The following are extracts from other journals:

SOME GOOD NEWS FOR FAT PEOPLE.

Our corpulent readers will be glad to learn how to positively lose two stone in about a month with the greatest possible benefit in health, strength and muscle, by a comparatively new system. It is a singular paradox that the patient, returning quickly to a healthy state, with increased activity of brain, digestive and other organs, naturally requires more food than hitherto, yet, notwithstanding this, he absolutely loses in weight one or two pounds daily, as the weighing-machine will prove. Thus there is no suggestion of starvation. It is an undoubted success and the author, who has devoted years of study to the subject, guarantees a noticeable reduction within twenty-four hours of commencing the treatment. This is different with other diseases, for the patient in some cases may go for weeks without being able to test whether the physician has rightly treated him, and may have derived no real or apparent improvement in health. Here, we repeat, the author guarantees it in twenty-four hours, the scale to be the unerring recorder. The treatment aims at the actual root of the disease, so that the superfluous fat does not return when discontinuing the treatment. It is perfectly harmless. We advise our readers to call the attention of stout friends to this, because, sincerely, we think they ought to know. For their information we may say that on sending threepence in stamps, a book entitled "Corpulency, and the Cure" (256 pages), containing a reprint of press notices from some hundreds of medical and other journals (British and Foreign) and other interesting particulars, including the "recipe," can be had from a Mr. F. C. Russell, Woburn House, Store Street, Bedford Square, London, W.C.—*Belfast News Letter.*

VICTIMS TO OBESITY.

This is a question which has occupied the attention of medical authorities from time immemorial. Some argue that the lean kind take longer to shuffle off the mortal coil than their stout brethren. The statistics naturally favour this argument, and no doubt are correct to a great extent, because sufferers from obesity are more susceptible to disease in consequence of the debilitated state of the system when clogged with abnormal adipose tissue; but a curious fact has been overlooked, viz., that corpulence generally commences about the age of thirty-five to fifty, after which time it seems to decrease; therefore, before the proverbial "three score and ten" is reached, the whilom fat man is, by a natural process, again reduced to what may only be called moderate plumpness, and thus cheats the statistician. Stout persons can now, thanks to science, reduce their weight in a most extraordinary rapid manner, without the slightest injury to their constitutions, or without resorting to those drastic remedies which only operate for a time, or by the continuance of the use of toxical drugs extending over such a period that renders it baneful to the long-suffering patient. An eminent Continental therapeutist recommends the victim to obesity to eat fat meat, while an equally eminent American prescribes lean ditto, and the stomach is to risk an accumulation of serious disorders by swallowing a pint of hot water daily, a most nauseous remedy we should think, and not unattended with danger. The past master in the cure of corpulence is Mr. F. C. Russell, of Woburn House, Store Street, London, W.C., whose book (256 pages), entitled "Corpulency, and the Cure," price only three penny stamps, seems to impress us considerably, for he reduces more weight by his system than the Continental and American physicians, without any of the absurd restrictions which would make life scarcely worth living. He uses simple herbs, the properties of which he seems to possess a more than usual knowledge of, and he makes but little secret of his method, so refreshing after the mystery made of most chemical and herbal concoctions for various complaints.—*Wetherby News.*

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CONSULTATIONS FREE.

You will observe that we have commenced a remarkable offer of fifty sovereigns to be distributed amongst the readers of *Short Stories* every week. We select fifty names and addresses from the various London and provincial directories and other sources, write them on fifty envelopes, put one sovereign in each envelope, and lock the whole up in the editorial safe. All the persons named who apply will have the money sent to them. Applications must be made on post-cards, and no money will be sent unless applied for. In view of the fact that the names are chosen promiscuously, it may so happen that some of those selected are of people who do not read *Short Stories*—your neighbour, for example, or your dressmaker or milkman. It would be doing them a good turn, therefore, if you suggested their applying to this office. If it should so happen they receive a sovereign, they will thank you. But don't omit to apply yourself at the same time.

T. G.—In some parts of Sweden women often work as farm labourers. If a woman has an infant she carries it in a leather bag on her back, after the manner of the Indian squaw, and is thus enabled to work with both hands.

Investors.—On an average, about two-fifths of the companies promoted yearly in England come to grief.

W. S.—Musket-balls were used as current coin in New England from 1638 to 1652. They were valued at one farthing, and were legal tender up to one shilling.

Cholly wants to know how to manage a silk hat when it has got a wetting. ——Leave the hat until partly dry without touching it, then wrap a towel carefully round it to absorb the dampness, moving the towel a little with the lay of the silk. When nearly dry, rub with a hot cloth until perfectly smooth and glossy.

Gallus.—There is a lake of blood-red water in the Grison Alps, between the places called Bruggershorn and Wolfsboden. The colour of the water is due to the presence of millions of vegetable infusoria. That portion of the Alps where the lake is situated is very seldom visited by tourists.

Max.—The figure of Britannia stamped on all our bronze coins owes its origin to the Romans, who cast it on medals to signalise their conquest over Britain. The figure is represented sitting on an island in order to show the nature of Great Britain, and her warlike accoutrements show the warlike spirit of her inhabitants. The lighthouse and ship are both modern innovations.

S. P.—A Roman camp, a Saxon temple and three cathedrals have in turn occupied the site of St. Paul's. The present cathedral was built from a tax on seaborne coal.

H. V.—The period known as the "Middle Ages" is not a fixed period, but varies in different countries. It may be said to cover 1,000 years, from the fifth to the fifteenth century. It may be roughly said to extend from the transfer of Imperial power from Rome to Constantinople in 476 to the beginning of the Reformation in 1520.

Reader.—The word "preface" used in the beginning of books was originally a word of welcome to a meal, and was equivalent to "Much good may it do you."

Ex.—The first formal and written treaty made by England with a foreign nation was that entered into by Henry III. with the Dauphin of France in 1217. The Dauphin was then in England and was leagued with the Barons.

Jack Tar.—The most dangerous part of the British coast is that which lies between Flamborough Head and the North Foreland. This includes both the Thames and the Humber. The next most dangerous coast line is that between Anglesea and the Mull of Cantire.

E. L. D.—The term "El Dorado" was not originally used to designate any particular place; it signifies "the gilded" or "the golden," and was variously applied. According to some authorities, it was used to designate a religious ceremony of the natives, who covered the anointed body with gold dust. On that account the whole of Guiana was at one time known by the name "El Dorado."

Clock.—The so-called "Dutch" clocks were "made in Germany," the centre of the trade being the village of Freyburg. They were exported to all parts of Europe under the name of "Dutch clocks." In his play of *Love's Labour Lost* Shakespeare discourses thus: "A woman that is like a German clock, still a-repairing; ever out of frame, and never going aright." There is evidence to show that Shakespeare was a 'cute business man, and he appears to have known a thing or two about clocks. Whether his comparison was right I am unable to say, not being personally acquainted with the lady referred to.

A. L. G.—The title of "Lord" Mayor of London was first conferred in 1354 upon Thomas Legge. There had been sixty Mayors of London before the more imposing title was conferred.

M. A.—The brown-red colour in the wooden shoes or sabots of the French and Belgian peasantry is produced by exposing them to the smoke of burning wood.

C. B.—Try a mixture of oil and graphite for preventing screws from becoming fixed; it will also protect them against rust for years. This mixture facilitates tightening up, is a good lubricant, and reduces the friction of the screw.

Toe.—Square-toed boots were the fashion in the time of Queen Mary. The width of the toes of men's boots became at length so great that a proclamation was issued, limiting the the width to six inches.

W. W. asks: "Why do glow worms shine?"——It is difficult to say for certain, for there are many reasons put forward. It is only the female who emits the phosphorescent light, and some people think it is for the purpose of attracting the attention of the males. Another theory is that glow worms shine in order to save themselves from capture by birds which feed upon insects, for the flesh of the glow worm not being particularly palatable, the light helps their would-be captors to recognise them, and so leave them alone. Other people think that the glow is to enable the little creature to see its way in the dark, while again others declare that it is an attraction for the bringing of other small animals within the range of the worm.

Flor.—The modern British florin was first coined in 1849, but florins are of ancient date. The first English florin was issued by Edward III.; its value was 6s. The piece derives its name Florence, where it was first coined. The two-shilling pieces coined in 1849 were called in owing to the fact that the letters F. D. (Defender of the Faith) were omitted from the Queen's title.

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Hairdressers fitted up. Estimates free.

Tobacconists Commencing. See Illd. Guide (230 pages) 3d. How to open a cigar store, £20 to £3,000 Tobacconists Outfitting Co., 186, Euston Road, London. The largest and original house (50 years reputation. Mgr., H. Myers

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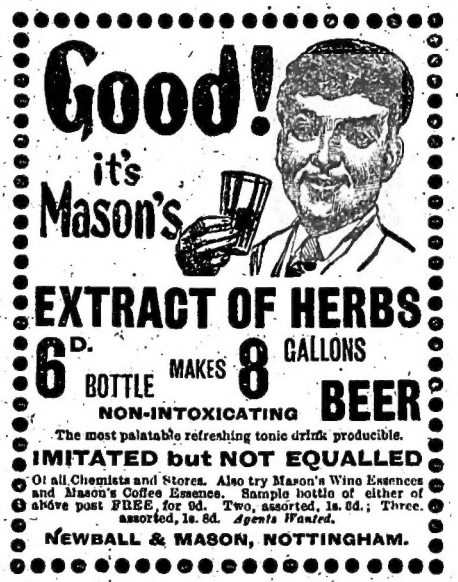

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